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Mystery of Hotel Briche

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

Eugene Chavette.

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MYSTERY OF HOTEL BRICHET.

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A Novel.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

EUGENE CHAVETTE.

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NEW YORK:

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS,

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PRESS OF
THE NEW YORK LEDGER
NEW YORK.

MYSTERY OF HOTEL BRICHET.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT crowd of gay, careless Parisians was gathered on a bright afternoon in January, 1721, in the Place de Greve before the prison of La Roquette, eager to witness the execution of the most infamous criminal of that criminal age.

For hours they had stood there patiently awaiting the moment when the confession of the doomed wretch before the judge should be finished, and the victim should expiate his crimes on the scaffold. But now they were laughing and singing as gayly as if celebrating some great deliverance, for was not Cartouche—the terror of France—about to be broken on the wheel? And was it not a duty and a pleasure to witness the last agony of the wretch whose deeds of blood had so long gone unavenged?

At every execution in those days it was customary for a judge of the Chatelet to proceed to the Hotel de Ville and there await the arrival of the condemned and

receive any revelations he might wish to make. This precaution was seldom without result, as the wretched creature at the sight of the scaffold, either with a vague hope for mercy, or merely to prolong his existence for a few hours, would usually offer to make a confession. The request was never refused.

And so it had been with Cartouche. He had signified to the executioner his desire to be taken to the Hotel de Ville, and had been conducted to the magistrate, M. de Badieres, who was seated in the low audience chamber.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon as M. de Badieres began to take the deposition, little dreaming of the strange emotions in store for him before it should close.

Believing he had been betrayed by his comrades, Cartouche's sole desire was for vengeance. One by one he denounced his late companions by name, betraying their various haunts, and recounting the part each had borne in the different expeditions. At each new name the judge would issue a warrant of arrest.

The time passed slowly, but in the great square the people were unusually patient. At each sortie of the police they imagined that another of the infamous band was about to be captured, and they waited quietly, without even thinking of crying for the prisoner.

Evening drew on. During the four hours the confession had lasted thirty persons had been implicated. Cartouche paused for a moment.

"Is that all?" asked the judge.

"All?" said the prisoner, grimly. "I should say not! I have named but a quarter of them yet; there are at least a hundred more. I should say it will take the whole night for me to pay off my trusty friends."

And he began the recital of another series of crimes

with the same details as before. And arrests followed so promptly that escape was rendered impossible. Nearly every member of the gang had now been traced to his lair, and many receivers of stolen goods, alarmed by the news of the confession, were seized in the act of escaping, laden with their spoils. The judge ordered the booty to be placed on the table before him, and it was soon covered with untold riches.

It was evident that Cartouche had but little more to say. By the repetition of his former assertions he was simply trying to postpone for a few hours the horrible death awaiting him outside.

"You have nothing more to say?" asked the judge, interrupting these vain repetitions.

"Nothing more, judge," answered the prisoner, who could not deny that his confession was ended; but at this moment his eye fell on some of the jewelry that lay in a heap on the table, and a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Ah!" he cried. "I quite forgot about the *procureur*."

"What do you mean by calling one of your gang the '*procureur*'?" asked M. de Badieres, never doubting that this was a nickname.

"Why? Because he was or is, as far as I remember, the *procureur* of the Chatelet," replied the brigand.

Amazed, the judge stared at Cartouche to assure himself that he was not joking. But the bandit was perfectly serious.

"And what is the real name of the man you call the '*procureur*'?" demanded the magistrate.

Cartouche reflected for a moment.

"Wait a bit," he said. "He 's such a cunning fellow that he has done every possible thing to hide himself. Ah, I have it! The blackguard's name is 'Brichet.'"

Despite his marvelous self-control, M. de Badieres

could not restrain a convulsive start on hearing this name.

"And what sort of a man is this Brichet?" asked the judge, in a voice of forced calmness.

"All that I could tell you would never make you know him half so well as that bracelet there, lying on that table. Your men must have bagged it at big Mary's when they took her. In it there is a secret locket, in which there is the exact likeness of our man."

With a trembling hand, M. de Badieres took the bracelet designated, found the secret spring, and opened the locket. At the sight of the portrait he started and became suddenly pale.

CHAPTER II.

Who was this Brichet, whose portrait and whose name had so strangely affected M. de Badieres?

In the year 1697, Athanase Brichet, one of the ablest *procureurs* of the Chatelet, resolved to retire from public life and to enjoy at leisure the large fortune he had amassed by the labor of forty years.

There were not wanting envious persons who hinted that he had gained this large fortune not so much from the emoluments of his office as from the lucky chance that had put into his hands the administration of the property of the celebrated Duke de Vivonne, the clever and dissipated brother of the beautiful Madame de la Montespan, who, after having squandered millions of money, had died in absolute poverty several years before. Of all the millions that had passed through the hands of this gay prodigal, had any portion stuck to the fingers of his administrator, Brichet? It is impossible to say, but certain it is that the Duke had inspired in M. Brichet's heart a feeling of the deepest gratitude, a sentiment not usually felt for the victim by those who have despoiled him. The *procureur* cherished the memory of the duke as something sacred, and always spoke of him with profound respect and emotion.

We shall not now pause to inquire into the motive that actuated Brichet, but content ourselves with the simple statement that in the year 1697 he had resolved

to retire from public life and enjoy his fortune. His first care on arriving at this decision was to find a worthy and suitable successor to his profession and dignities, and his choice fell on his son, then a young man thirty years of age, already well versed in every quibble of the law, and possessing in a most remarkable degree an aptitude for sharp practice of all kinds. We cannot pretend that this aptitude was a natural gift, for only five years before Victor had shown the strongest distaste for anything approaching to a sedentary life, and he had evinced the wildest desire to be a sailor and to wander forth in search of adventures. He longed for a life of excitement and romance rather than the monotony of his father's office. However, being a young man who listened to reason, he consented, after two serious interviews with his father, to abandon his passion for a roving life and to adopt the sober career that lay before him. With so much zeal and good-will did he do this, that five years later his father could find no more suitable person to fill his own place.

So Athanase Brichet retired from office to enjoy his large fortune in a state of golden idleness, and Victor, the son, reigned in his stead.

Resolving to make his old age as splendid as possible, the old man purchased two houses on the Ile St. Louis, in the suburbs, demolished them, and on their site built for himself a magnificent mansion. Nothing was spared in the construction and decoration of this superb dwelling. Perhaps the most conspicuous ornament was a full-length portrait of M. De Vivonne, bearing the following inscription :

"Victor de Rochechouart, Duc De Vivonne."

But when his house was finished, Brichet's career

was ended by a fit of apoplexy, and he rested in the cemetery of St. Jean.

Finding himself his own master and sole heir to his father's immense fortune, it was natural that young Brichet should abandon his profession and proceed to indulge the roving inclinations that had so strongly possessed him but a few years before. But he did nothing of the kind. He not only retained his office, but continued to follow diligently the sedentary life that had formerly been so distasteful to him.

He dismissed the whole retinue of his father's servants, with a handsome remuneration, retaining only a single valet named Colard, who, with a cook, sufficed for his modest establishment in the Rue de Mouton, where his office was situated.

Colard was at this time about forty-five years of age, a perfect type of a faithful servant. Discreet, upright and devoted to his master, he performed his duties silently and deftly. Tall and thin, taciturn and absolutely devoid of curiosity, he possessed invaluable qualities for a servant, and the *procureur* soon gave him his entire confidence. Once a week Colard was dispatched to the Quai de Betham for the purpose of airing the empty house. Each time he returned full of admiration and regret at all the useless splendor there displayed.

"When will monsieur inhabit his noble mansion?" the worthy servant would inquire.

"God only knows," Brichet would reply. But suddenly Brichet committed what his best friends unanimously declared to be an extraordinary act of folly.

In his daily walks from his house to the chatelet he had often encountered a charming young girl, whom he admired as the ideal of natural refinement and modesty.

Brichet, although now thirty-five years of age, had never loved. He was instantly bewitched by this pretty creature, and, regarding her in the light of a momentary caprice, soon set Colard on her traces. His servant returned with the fullest particulars. She was a good, hard-working girl named Pigeot, earning her own livelihood and living alone in a garret. Her mother was dead, and her father was a journeyman shoemaker at Nancy. She had been brought to Paris by a countess in the capacity of lady's maid. Unfortunately the countess had a dissipated husband, whose behavior toward the poor girl made it impossible for her to remain in the countess's service. Unable to return home, the journey to Nancy being a long and expensive one, she obtained work as a seamstress, hoping soon to gain sufficient money to enable her to return to her father.

Brichet, thinking that the handsome daughter of a poor shoemaker would be well-fitted to make him a charming companion, dispatched Colard to offer her the most advantageous terms. But his servant was an upright man, and being unused to this kind of diplomacy, utterly failed to bring her to terms. Resistance and difficulties only fanned the flame of Brichet's smoldering love ; what had at first been merely a passing caprice became a serious passion, and he resolved to offer marriage. Still, he hesitated. What ! Brichet, the millionaire—the *procureur—marry* the daughter of a cobbler, whom he would be forced to acknowledge as father-in-law ! Never !

But "Love will still be lord of all," and Brichet found at last the means of gratfying his passion and saving at the same time his self-love. He at once hurried the devoted Colard to Nancy, with orders to find out old Pigeot to gain his consent to the marriage, and

to make an agreement with him, that in consideration of his receiving a yearly income of six hundred francs he would never seek to see his daughter again.

The following month Pauline Pigeot was married to Brichet, who introduced her to all his friends as an orphan. The *procureur* had made a lucky choice, for Pauline was a good and charming woman, who soon rose to the level of her brilliant position without losing any of the innocence of her days of poverty.

A week after the wedding Brichet sold his practice to his chief clerk, installed himself in his superb mansion on the Quai de Betham, and from this time led the life of a man happy and beloved.

The father-in-law kept his promise and gave no sign of life, beyond sending regularly his quarterly receipt for the pension forwarded to him by Colard. This happy state of affairs had lasted ten years, when an event occurred which cast a cloud over the hitherto untroubled horizon.

Colard, who up to this time was the only person who had had any intercourse with the old cobbler, fell seriously ill from brain fever, which kept him for three weeks in a state of delirium. The quarterly pension at this moment falling due, and Brichet not being able to obtain any particulars from Colard, wrote to an attorney at Nancy, inclosing the old man's money, and begged him to find out Pigeot and pay it over to him. A fortnight after the banknote was returned from Nancy, in a letter as follows :

"HONORED SIR : I have searched the whole town and can find no one of the name of Pigeot ; in fact, I am certain that no person of that name has ever inhabited the place."

On reading this note Brichet's amazement may be imagined.

"Then for the last ten years," he said to himself, "who the deuce can have been drawing this pension and sending in the receipts?"

He had, however, the sense not to mention the matter to his wife without having had an explanation with Colard, who alone held the key to the mystery. As soon as his servant had sufficiently recovered, Brichet showed him the letter, and Colard was as deeply mystified as his master; but being determined to clear up the matter, he insisted on setting out at once for Nancy. The good man, however, in his anxiety to serve his master had over-rated his physical strength, and a week later Brichet learned from him that a return of the fever had forced him to remain in bed for the last five days in the town of Chalons.

The same post brought another letter addressed to Madame Brichet, from her father, announcing to her that, having implicated himself in some political broil, his friends had concealed him from all research and that he was now safely in Brussels, whence the letter was dated.

"Then he must have taken the lawyer of Nancy for a detective and destroyed every trace of his whereabouts," thought Brichet, when his wife told him of her father's letter, and he immediately wrote to Colard, telling him to abandon his futile journey and to return to Paris. Two weeks later Colard returned, pale and exhausted from suffering and fatigue, and this was the only trouble Brichet had from his accommodating father-in-law—the only result being that the quarterly pension was now dispatched to Brussels.

But everything comes to an end in this world, and nothing more surely than happiness. After seventeen years of unclouded bliss his beloved wife died, leaving for his consolation a charming daughter sixteen years

of age, as sweet and amiable as her mother, and, like her, bearing the name of Pauline.

The death of Madame Brichet seemed as great a blow to the good Colard as to her hushand. The old servant had an absolute adoration for his mistress. On her part, Madame Brichet knew full well the priceless devotion of her humble friend, and in her last moments she whispered to him: "Watch over my daughter."

The performance of this last request now became a sacred duty for Colard, who henceforth transferred to Pauline the respectful love he had hitherto shown for her mother. The old man was her willing slave, ready at any moment to lay down his life in her service.

Brichet, after much weeping, soon dried his eyes and began to recover from his grief. After two years he began to ask himself why he should not, by a second marriage, renew the lost happiness of his first. He was then fifty-four years of age, and he resolved to take a young wife, alleging as an excuse that she would be a pleasant companion for Pauline. His choice fell on Mlle. Aurore Fouquier, daughter of a captain of light dragoons, who had no objection to a son-in-law older than himself, that son-in-law being a millionaire.

When Brichet announced his approaching marriage to Colard he felt bound to make some excuse for himself.

"Look here, my good Colard," he said, in a whimpering voice; "you know I am perfectly alone in the world."

"Have you forgotten your daughter?" replied the latter, dryly.

"My good fellow, it 's just on her account I am sacrificing myself and taking a young wife. They are of the same age, and will love each other like sisters."

Colard gave Brichet a reproachful look, but said no more.

By this time the memory of his late wife had completely faded from Brichet's mind. He had even ceased to pay the pension to his first and ever invisible father-in-law.

"He must be dead," he thought.

The following month the marriage was celebrated, and Victor Brichet gave to his daughter Pauline a stepmother of nineteen. His second wife had different views of life from those of the first, and soon the hotel on the Quai de Betham awakened to the sounds of revelry. The beautiful young bride was universally admired. During six weeks her old husband was radiantly happy, but one day he became sad, the next morose, and the third day he was transformed into a savage. At last, without giving the slightest previous notice of his whim, he left the house, taking with him only a small valise, and never returned. Month after month passed away, and Brichet gave no sign of existence. M. De Badieres, his most intimate friend, did everything in his power to find some trace of the missing man, and in all his efforts was most ably seconded by Colard. The good fellow had at first been irritated at the foolish marriage of his master, viewing it in the light of an injustice to Pauline, but since Brichet's disappearance Colard's anger had completely died away, and all his old love and devotion for his master revived. He at length found the name of "Brichet" inscribed in the register of public carriages at Versailles, and that he had thence taken the coach to Chartres, where all clue to his proceedings was lost. Had he continued his journey, or had he returned to Paris? The latter hypothesis appalled both M. De Badieres and the old servant, for it was possible that

Brichet, on his return, might have been the victim of one of those ghastly murders with which Cartouche and his band were wont to terrify the town, and at each new discovery of a dead body stretched on the Paris pavement, Colard would rush to the scene, fearing to behold the well-remembered features of his beloved master.

Two years elapsed. Brichet had not returned, nor had all the zeal of faithful friends been able to determine whether he were dead or alive.

One may readily comprehend the terrified emotion of M. de Badieres when Cartouche suddenly pronounced the name of Brichet, this friend of his youth, whom he had been seeking so fruitlessly and long. But notwithstanding the title of *procureur*, and despite the extraordinary resemblance of the portrait in the locket, M. de Badieres utterly rejected the idea that Brichet, happy, prosperous and respected, could have any complicity with the villainous assassin. It seemed impossible that any chain of events should have brought them in contact.

"What part did this man, whom you call the *procureur*, take in your expeditions?" asked the judge, trying to steady his voice.

"Oh, he was one of those cunning monkeys who never pull the chestnuts out of the fire themselves. He was contented to give advice and to put us up to many a good thing."

"How old is he?"

"Well, fifty-five or six, I should say."

At this reply M. de Badieres shuddered, knowing full well that this was just the age of Brichet.

"Where can the police find this man?" proceeded the judge.

"In the Rue de la Bacherie, at a tinsmith's on the

third story. Knock five times, and he will open a little slide in the door, then give the password, 'Let us talk of M. de Vivonne,' and he will let you in."

"How long has he belonged to your band?"

"About two years."

This answer corresponded with the date of Brichet's disappearance, and with a trembling and fevered hand M. de Badieres wrote the warrant.

"Have you nothing more to say?" asked M. de Badieres, anxious to put an end to the trying scene.

"No," stammered Cartouche, and at a sign from the judge the executioners dragged him away.

A few minutes later a dull thud, followed by a frightful shriek of agony, told the listeners that the first blow of the iron bar had descended on the convict whose bones were to be broken on the wheel.

CHAPTER III.

In the midst of the general rejoicing at the death of Cartouche, one man was unhappy. M. de Badieres, on leaving the Hotel de Ville, wandered listlessly in the streets of Paris trying to believe the robber's story impossible.

"How could dear old Brichet have anything to do with such a scoundrel? What could possibly be his motive? He had an immense fortune, no enemies, and his late marriage had made him the happiest of men! Neither love of money, desire for vengeance nor despair could make him join such a gang of ruffians."

But among all his specious arguments the question would ever assert itself: Why did he disappear?

"Perhaps the man whom he denounced may be like Brichet, and these blackguards may have thought it a good joke to dub him '*procureur*.' I daresay I shall find but a faint resemblance to my old friend when he appears before me after his arrest." *After his arrest!* These three last words petrified the judge. The idea was too preposterous. He even began to laugh at his own folly. "I am mad," he said, "and unfair to my good friend in thinking of such absurdities." But at this moment one fact filled him with dread. The

password by which this criminal was to be captured was "Let us talk of M. de Vivonne," and the judge shuddered. Absorbed in these thoughts he had wandered at random through the streets of Paris and now had arrived at Brichet's mansion. He knocked at the door. It was opened by Colard.

"Have you any news of my good master?" he asked of the judge. This was always the question of the old servant on seeing the magistrate, and the judge had so often answered "No," that Colard could not repress a startled cry when M. de Badieres replied:

"Yes, I have had news, strange news."

The judge was so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he paid no attention to Colard, but on suddenly raising his eyes he exclaimed:

"Good God, Colard, what's the matter?"

The man was as pale as death, and his legs seemed unable to support him.

"Ah, sir! You have given me a terrible blow," he stammered feebly, "when you said you had news. I thought you meant that my master had been found, but when you added 'strange news,' I was sure he is dead; and to pass in a moment from joy to despair is indeed hard. I have guessed rightly, have I not, that my dear master is dead?"

There was such despairing affection in Colard's voice that M. de Badieres thought: "He was so fond of Brichet that I can trust him to help me." The judge gently pushed Colard aside and entered the hall, saying:

"Calm yourself, my good friend, and tell me first, where are the ladies?"

"At the back of the house."

"Don't disturb them," the judge said, "it is to you I want to speak. Come with me into the little parlor."

The magistrate entered, followed by Colard. "Now, my friend," he said, "I want you to try and remember everything."

"The first Madame Brichet was an orphan, was she not, as Brichet said?"

The existence of the cobbler Pigeot being his master's secret and not his, Colard replied:

"Yes, sir, she was."

"Had Madame Brichet any relatives with whom her husband could have been on bad terms?"

"None, sir."

"Were there any members of his own family with whom he had quarreled?"

"No, sir, he had no relatives."

"Try to remember if there was any person on whom he wished to be revenged?"

"My master never mentioned a human being connected with his past life excepting one man, and that, certainly not with hatred."

"And who was he?"

"Monsieur de Vivonne."

At this name M. de Badieres paused. The terrible password rang in his ears, "Let us talk of M. de Vivonne." He proceeded:

"Do you know why your master had so great an affection for the duke, who died thirty-three years ago?"

"It was some secret told him by his father, sir."

"Does any one else know this secret?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any likeness of Brichet?"

"We had a miniature belonging to Miss Pauline, but last Christmas it was stolen from her at the midnight mass."

Involuntarily M. de Badieres's fingers closed round

the bracelet in his pocket. Nothing that Colard had said gave him the slightest clue, but he continued :

"Try to recall everything your master said or did the day before he went away."

"He was out the whole day."

"And where do you imagine he went ?"

"To your house, sir."

"So he did, but he stayed there only an hour."

"To his lawyers, perhaps, sir," said Colard in a hesitating voice, trying to remember.

"Do you suppose it was to make his will ?"

Instead of answering, Colard looked suspiciously at the judge and seemed to inquire the object of all these questions, and, M. de Badieres, divining his thought, resumed :

"Oh, don't look so fierce, my good Colard. All that I am asking is purely in your master's interest. So I repeat my question. You suppose he went to make his will ?"

"Yes, sir, for he was going on a journey."

"Are you sure of that ?"

Suspicion again appeared in Colard's eyes.

"Where else could he be going ?" he asked dryly.

"How should I know," replied the judge. "But it might have been to some dangerous rendezvous or on some perilous adventure.

Colard looked at the judge and became deadly pale.

"What makes you turn pale ?" asked the magistrate, who noticed the old man's emotion.

"Why, sir ? Because for the last hour you have been torturing me with questions, because I am certain you have come to this house with news of some dreadful misfortune which is about to fall on Miss Pauline, and

perhaps make a wreck of her life; because I feel that my young lady is threatened with some anguish much more horrible than the news of her father's death," and Colard burst into tears.

The name of Pauline put an end at once to the struggle within M. de Badieres, and the thought that this innocent girl, whom he had known from her birth, must henceforth bear a dishonored name if he persisted in his duty, made him deaf to the appeals of his judicial conscience.

"You are very fond of Miss Pauline, then?" he said.

"Yes, sir, her mother left her to me on her death-bed," said the valet with great earnestness.

"And you are much attached to your master also?"

"Yes," said Colard, but this time with his old suspicion.

"Well, then, in the interest of Miss Pauline and her father, I am going to intrust you with a mission which you must swear to me never to reveal."

"I swear it," said Colard.

"Go to the Rue de la Bacherie and look for the house of a tinsmith. Go up three stories and give five knocks at a door with a slide in it."

"Five knocks," repeated the amazed domestic.

"When the slide opens repeat the password: 'Let us talk of M. de Vivonne.' Then the door will open and you will find yourself in the presence of some one whom you know. Say to him, 'You have been denounced! Fly this instant! M. de Badieres will wait two days before doing his duty as a magistrate.' Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir, and in doing all this you assure me that I am preventing some dreadful misfortune to Miss Paul-

ine ?" asked Colard, looking the judge straight in the face.

"You will be quite certain of that when you see the person to whom I am sending you," replied M. de Badieres, with a ghastly smile.

Without saying more Colard set off as fast as his old legs would carry him. In a quarter of an hour he reached the Rue de la Bacherie, found the tinsmith's house, mounted to the third story, and found himself before a door with a slide. He gave five knocks.

CHAPTER IV.

The state of licence and corruption prevailing in France during the Regency has never been equaled in that country. It was a time of the most unbridled profligacy and debauchery. Duels, elopements, disgraceful liaisons, riotous orgies, public scandals, combats with the police were the daily occupation of the great nobles, and in the celebrated taverns many a great lady might be publicly seen on the arm of her lover, in the company of common soldiers, grisettes and the lowest of the populace.

Among the most celebrated of these taverns was the Broc d' Or, situated on a corner of the Place de Greve.

The ground floor consisted of a long room, half saloon and half kitchen, rudely furnished with wooden tables, where the common people, seated on rough benches, regaled themselves from tin pots.

Very different were the appointments of the two upper stories, where every luxury awaited the wealthy guests of the house, who called for the finest wines and discussed them in the choicest company.

Although the spacious Broc d' Or never wanted customers, it was always invaded by a crowd that overflowed its precincts whenever an execution took place on the Place de Greve. The windows looking on the

square afforded an excellent opportunity to regale the senses by an exhibition at once so fascinating and so delightful, while the observer tested the rare wines and exquisite cookery of Maître Gerome, the landlord.

So to his great joy, on the 11th of January, the Broc d' Or was already thronged, and on hearing that Cartouche was about to make a confession, Maître Gerome rubbed his hands with renewed delight, knowing that the longer his customers remained the more they would pay.

His especial attention was given to a couple in the front room on the second story. The man was tall, handsome, about twenty-eight years of age, with a bold face and reckless manner. Despite his distinguished name and his polished manners, one felt instinctively that the Chevalier de Lozeril was corrupt to the core, that no means would be too base, no proceeding too dishonorable for him. His companion, a young lady of twenty-six, was the Marquise de Brageron, graceful and of marvelous beauty.

On entering, the marquise glanced at the table, and, seeing it laid for seven persons, asked :

"What is the party to be ?"

"De Ravannes and his presidente."

"A jolly couple, and who else ?"

"The Comte de Lacenais and the little baroness, who never leaves him."

"That 's good. You and I make six. Who' s the seventh ? A lady ?"

"No, marquise, a gentleman," said De Lozeril, hesitating.

"Ah ! Who is he ?"

Still the chevalier hesitated and then replied :

"The Baron de Cambiac."

An angry light glittered in the lady's eyes, and her

beautiful mouth gave an expression of bitter hate, but quickly recovering herself, she remarked carelessly :

"Ah, M. de Cambiac !"

"You are not displeased, marquise ?"

"Why should I be displeased ? No one could have been a better friend of mine than De Cambiac !"

At this avowal De Lozeril, in his turn, became white with rage, and his emotion did not escape the marquise. Looking him straight in the face, she said, in a mocking tone :

"So you, too, hate De Cambiac. I need not be a witch to see your game. You have long been trying to meet M. de Cambiac, and here, at last, is your chance. Invited, I suppose, by Ravannes or Lacenais, he little expects to meet us here ?"

De Lozeril was speechless with embarrassment.

"And then you hoped," continued the marquise, "that seeing me might induce him to make some allusion to the past as a sneer, or a joke, and then—"

"And then I shall kill him !" cried the young man with jealous fury.

"I forbid you to do anything of the kind," replied the marquise in a cold voice.

"You forbid me ! So you still love this man ?"

Furious at this reproach Mme. de Brageron rushed at De Lozeril, seized him by the wrist, and dragging him violently toward her, exclaimed in a voice trembling with anger :

"Listen to me, you baby ! You cannot hate De Cambiac half as bitterly as I do. You hate him for having been my lover, and I detest him for leaving me so brutally. You want your revenge, and so do I. But to kill him by a stupid sword thrust ! Bah ! That is too simple."

"What do you want, then ?"

"I want a revenge," said the marquise slowly and distinctly, "that will punish and dishonor not only him, but those who are most dear to him, which at one blow will kill him and the wretched woman who has supplanted me, and whose name I have never discovered."

The chevalier gazed at the young woman, fascinated by her terrible beauty, as she continued :

"Will you obey me blindly, without even seeking to understand my motives ?"

"I will."

"Well, then, when De Cambiac comes in, pretend to be very glad to see him. On finding me calm and indifferent after two years of separation, he will think I have forgotten our past, and he will be off his guard. After dinner, Monsieur de Ravannes, who is mad about cards, is certain to propose a game."

Here the marquise stopped, and looking steadily at her lover, said :

"I suppose you know how to win *in any case ?*"

At this question, which clearly proved that the lady had but little opinion of his honesty, De Lozeril was about to protest, but before he could say a word the marquise proceeded :

"I insist, do you hear ? You *must* win !" and the chevalier, looking rather uneasy, responded :

"Well, supposing I do, what then ?"

"You will let the baron go on losing money, and after that he will lose his temper."

"And I shall pretend to take offense at something he says and challenge him ?"

"Not at all, chevalier ; the provocation must not come from you, but from De Lacenais, who has a most aggravating tongue. He is certain to make some joke about De Cambiac's continued bad luck, and you will burst into a loud laugh."

"But then the baron will quarrel with De Lacenais, and not with me."

"Not at all. He likes and esteems De Lacenais and won't mind his little joke, but he will be furious at your laughter becauses he despises you."

De Lozeril took no notice of his lady's insult, and replied :

"Then it is De Cambiac who will challenge me ; but it matters little, after all, so long as I fight him. Then we shall go out, eh, marquise ?"

"No, you will say slowly and distinctly : 'Before fighting a man it is usual to pay him what you owe.'"

At this extraordinary command of his mistress, De Lozeril stared at her and stammered out :

"And after that ?"

"Ah, that isn't your affair. After that you will let events take their course. Obey me, that is all."

"But," said the chevalier, making a faint resistance.

"Didn't you swear to obey me blindly ?" interrupted the marquise, in a stern voice.

"'Very well," said De Lozeril, resignedly.

"Ah, by the way, I have forgotten one detail," the lady added. "I may possibly at the moment of the challenge have left the room, but don't trouble yourself about me. You may be certain I am at work elsewhere in the accomplishment of our revenge."

The conversation was scarcely ended when De Ravannes and the Comte de Lacenais arrived, with their respective ladies. Five minutes later the door opened again and the Baron de Cambiac entered. His eyes fell on De Lozeril and the marquise, and he would have beaten a hasty retreat had not De Ravannes seized him by the arm, crying gayly :

"Ah, here you come at last ! We were only waiting for you," as he drew him into the room.

Although the hesitation of the baron had been momentary, it had not escaped the marquise, who thought to herself: "He suspects us!"

De Cambiac advanced, bowed low before Mme. De Brageron and raised his eyes to meet the expected look of coldness and disdain, but the marquise smiled sweetly at him, and said, in a voice that she knew so well how to make tender:

"Ah, M. De Cambiac! It is actually two years since we last met. You have neglected your best friends."

This reception somewhat reassured De Cambiac, and he saluted De Lozeril in a friendly manner, while De Ravannes hastened to present him to the rest of the party.

"Dear friend, come here and let me introduce you to the presidente."

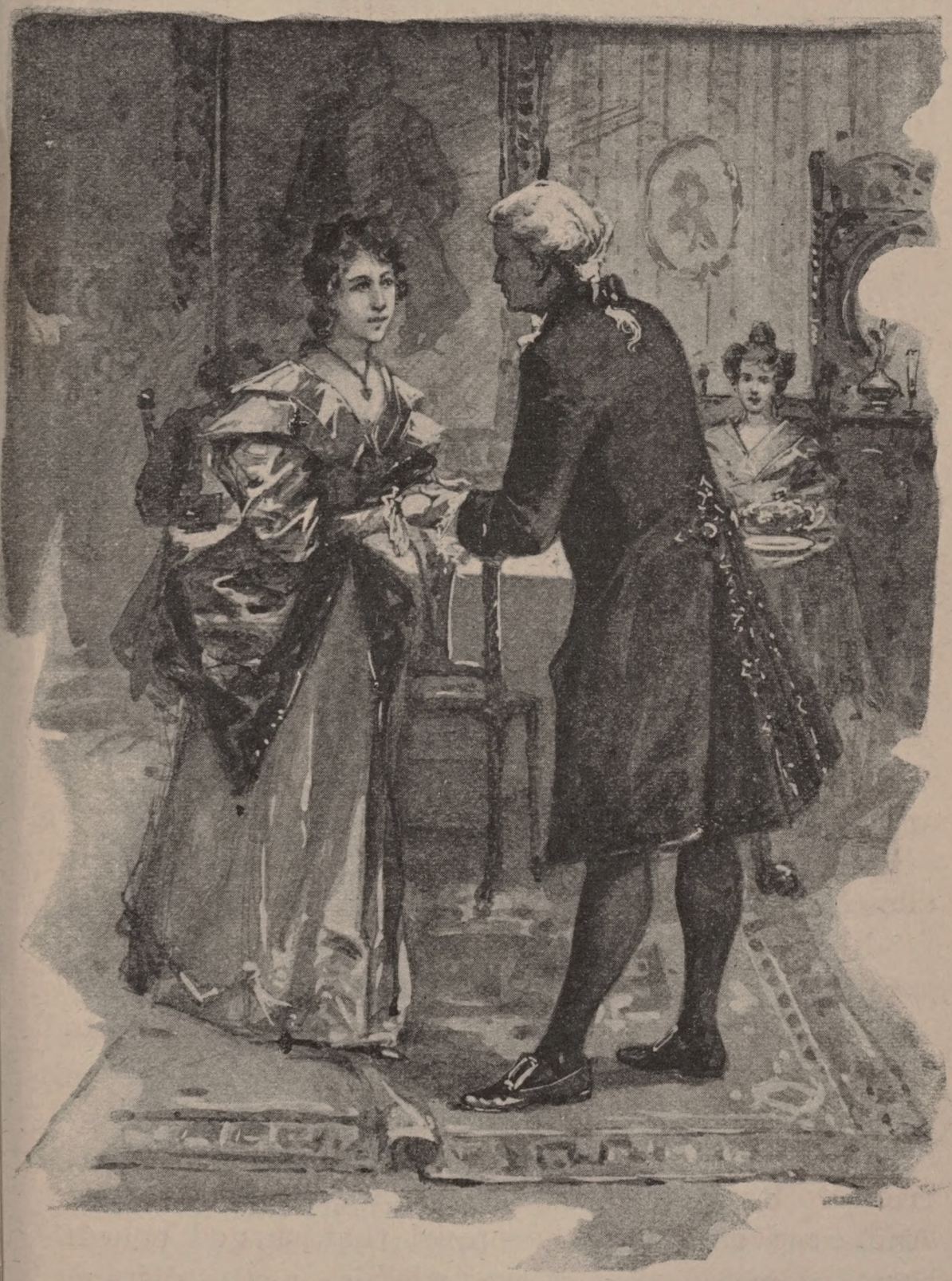
Of a pink-and-white complexion and tottering on the verge of corpulence, the presidente was a charming blonde, as greedy as a cat, and had dispatched her husband to the provinces to fill his presidential chair, in order that she might remain in Paris and indulge her appetite in peace.

A lively conversation ensued, in which the frightful tales of the Cartouche murders were repeated.

"Listen!" cried the presidente. "Isn't that the great bell of the cathedral tolling?"

"Yes, that means that the doomed man has quitted Notre Dame after his penitence, and is now on his way here," said De Lacenais.

"To the windows, ladies, quick! To the windows!" cried De Ravannes. "The cart must be here directly." And a movement of the crowd that surged beneath them indicated that it was visible in the distance. Another moment and Cartouche arrived on the Place de Greve.



PAULINE RAN TOWARD HIM.—*See Page* 42.

"Ah, the gallant brigand! You see he is going to oblige us by making a confession, so we may enjoy our dinner in the meantime."

In a few minutes the seven guests were seated around the table, and at the very first summons Maître Gerome appeared, attended by his aids, carrying in the steaming dishes and innumerable bottles of wine. It was now two o'clock; and the usual dinner hour being twelve, each one brought a good appetite to the enjoyment of the choice repast. The little banquet proceeded gayly. De Lozeril showed so much good-humored gayety, and Mme. De Brageron continued to smile so sweetly, that De Cambiac threw aside all his former suspicion and abandoned himself to the pleasure of dining in congenial company. But however exquisite may be the wine, and however perfect the cookery, the moment comes at last when the most intrepid diner must confess himself vanquished, and this moment having arrived, the guests rose, and De Ravannes uttered the fatal words:

"Gentlemen, I propose a game of cards!"

"A splendid idea!" cried De Lacenais.

"Done!" assented De Cambiac.

De Lozeril bowed affirmatively, well pleased that the proposal had not come from him, and a rapid glance at the marquis revealed to him a triumphant smile on her expressive lips. During the next two hours De Cambiac won incessantly; then the luck turned, and it was the chevalier who cleared the table. De Cambiac played eagerly, hoping to retrieve his losses. The night passed, and at dawn of day the baron, irritated at his continued bad luck, tripled the stakes.

"Oh, I do not play so high!" protested De Lacenais, rising from the table, and De Ravannes followed his example.

The game continued between De Lozeril and the baron, the other two gentlemen watching the play with keen interest, and at this moment the marquise glided from the room. As to the other ladies, one was snoring in a corner, and the presidente was fast asleep, with her nose in a plate of whipped cream.

"A hundred Louis on credit!" cried De Cambiac, feverishly, having parted with all his ready money, and half an hour later he had lost on parole four thousand crowns.

"Ah, my dear baron," remarked De Lacenais, "proverbs were not made for you, as it seems you are as unlucky at play as you are in love!"

Following the instructions of his mistress, De Lozeril now burst into a loud, mocking laugh, and irritated at once by his losses and by De Lacenais's sarcasm, De Cambiac cried, in a tone of suppressed fury:

"Is that Cartouche bellowing on the Place?"

"No, Monsieur le Baron, it is I," De Lozeril answered quietly.

"Ah, indeed!" retorted De Cambiac. "Then I only mistook one blackguard for another!"

De Ravannes and De Lacenais tried to stop the feud, but the baron, beside himself with rage, cried out fiercely:

"No, no, my friends! Let me alone. Let me take this opportunity of ridding the world of an infernal scoundrel!"

At this fresh insult De Lozeril threw himself back in his chair, and, still obeying his orders to the letter, said, in a slow and distinct voice:

"Before killing a man, it is usual to pay him what you owe!"

At these words De Cambiac's fury seemed to vanish.

Pale as death, and with a voice trembling with emotion, he cried :

"You are right, sir, and I will pay you !"

"Oh, pray don't inconvenience yourself, you have twenty-four hours' grace."

Thereupon De Cambiac, bowing low, and without another word, left the room. On the staircase he called for the landlord.

"Gerome, show me where I can sit down a moment and write a few words, and send me one of your waiters to take a message."

Maître Gerome led the way to his own room. De Cambiac traced a few lines without signature, addressed it, and said to the waiter :

"You see this ring, it is worth twenty louis. It is yours if in an hour you deliver this note to the person for whom it is intended and bring me the answer."

The boy flew like the wind, but he had scarcely cleared the crowd when a little delicate hand was laid on his arm.

"You belong to the Broc d' Or, don't you?" asked a veiled lady.

"Yes, madam."

"Do you know if Monsieur de Cambiac is at this moment in your establishment?"

And the boy, thinking himself remarkably clever, replied :

"It is probably you for whom this note is intended."

"Probably !" said the lady, seizing on the missive. She forced the seal, which was as yet soft, and read as follows :

"Aurore, I must see you this instant, or I am ruined," and the address was "Madame Brichet, Quai de Betham."

Hastily resealing the letter, the wax being warm, she returned it to the lad, saying :

"We were mistaken. After all, this note is not for me. Here is a louis to make you forget the double imprudence we have committed—you in giving it to me, and I in opening it."

"And seeing him depart on his errand, the marquise murmured, in a voice of mingled joy and hatred :

"At last I know the guardian angel whom De Cambiac invokes in his distress!"

CHAPTER V.

In the rear of the Hotel Brichet was a fine garden, extending as far as the Rue St. Louis, and terminating in an elegant pavilion, which had been used by the late Mme. Brichet as an oratory. Her more worldly-minded successor had converted it into a charming *boudoir*, furnished in the most luxurious and costly style, and here Aurore would while away the summer days, enjoying the cool and balmy breezes, while the fine old trees of the garden afforded refreshing shelter from the rays of the noonday sun.

The pavilion communicated with the Rue St. Louis by a little door cut in the wall, which was never used except on Sundays, when Pauline, attended by the faithful Colard, went to hear mass at the church in the same street. Although we have observed that Mme. Aurore Brichet conducted herself with becoming propriety during her husband's absence, it cannot be said that his disappearance had by any means plunged her into despair. Neither did the world expect any extraordinary manifestation of distress from this young woman of twenty, who had been married for her beauty by a rich and selfish man, old enough to be her father.

Widely different were the feelings of Brichet's

daughter, who had adored him. His mysterious disappearance was a daily and hourly torture to her loving heart, and although the poor girl felt that she was doing Aurore an injustice, she could not banish from her mind the idea that the advent of her stepmother had been the cause of the great sorrow that now overshadowed her life. And so it happened that each day saw them drifting more widely apart. Pauline chose to stay in the hotel, where everything reminded her of her beloved father, while Aurore preferred her dainty pavilion and the flowers.

The grand salon, therefore, became the neutral ground where the two young women met to receive the many friends of Brichet who came to enliven their solitude. Aurore and Pauline emulated one another in their attentions to their guests, so that each one departed fully convinced of the affection existing between Brichet's wife and daughter. The mansion was kept in a state of perpetual animation by the noisy and jovial proceedings of a gay and festive personage to whom we have hitherto neglected to introduce the reader. In marrying a second time, Brichet had become possessed of a new father-in-law, a person much less discreet and very much more visible than the accommodating cobbler. Annibal Fouquier, the captain of light dragoons, who had been so ready to bestow his young daughter on Brichet, was a thorough-paced scoundrel. Tall, and with the strength of Hercules, he was a drunkard, gambler and expert duelist. His character had been so unprincipled that he had been degraded from his rank in the army. Always in want of money from his losses at the gaming-table, it may be imagined with what delight he had welcomed the millionaire Brichet as a son-in-law, turning a deaf ear to the remonstrances of his daugh-

ter, who had revolted against the idea of so old a husband.

"So much the better," said he. "The older he is, the sooner you will be a widow, little idiot!"

"But don't you know, father, I have chosen another?" Aurore had answered.

"All the more reason for marrying Brichet."

"But you allowed me to love that young man."

"And I allow you to love him still, my dear, but that need not prevent your marrying the *procureur*," had been the reply of the worthy captain.

But as Aurore persisted in her objections, her father grew angry, and twisting his mustache in a desperate rage, demanded furiously:

"Must I kill your young puppy, then, to bring you to reason?"

Whereupon Aurore, who knew her father's fatal dexterity as a duelist, and trembling for her lover's safety, had given an unwilling consent.

"Quite right, my dear," the amiable Annibal observed. "You marry Brichet, and your sweetheart shall live."

Aurore did marry Brichet, bringing to the sacrifice so much sad resignation that even the captain had some faint twinges of remorse during the ceremony, saying to himself:

"After all, Aurore is a good little girl, and if Brichet will only take to drinking, I will soon make her a widow."

And, indeed, Annibal was so intrepid a drinker that he was perfectly capable of putting his plan in execution, as it was only after despatching a dozen bottles that his libations began to take effect. At first Brichet had been rather alarmed at the possession of such a father-in-law, but he soon secured immunity from his

presence by given him a pension to live at a distance.

No sooner did the *procureur* disappear than the irrepressible captain returned, and under the pretext of protecting the two ladies, took up his abode in the Hotel Brichet.

For him life had, indeed, become a paradise, and to eat, drink and be merry at the expense of the worthy *procureur* was now the aim and object of his existence. There was but one obstacle to his complete felicity. So long as the noisy captain and his companions continued their carousals, Colard looked on with silent disapproval, and paid, without remonstrance, the monthly pension fixed by Brichet, although it had been granted on the distinct understanding that Fouquier should enjoy it at a distance ; but it was quite another affair when the captain demanded an addition to his income.

"You must double my pension, do your hear, you old fool ?" roared Annibal.

"I shall await my master's orders."

"But he has gone to the devil !"

"Then we shall wait till he returns," retorted the immovable Colard.

Fouquier did his utmost to procure his dismissal, but Pauline, who loved the old servant, protected him, and the family notary would pay over Brichet's revenues to no one else.

The captain had tried to win over Aurore to his side, but she knew the perfect honesty of the valet, and, having had full experience of her father's administrative capacity, turned a deaf ear to all her father's arguments. Colard, therefore, retained his position, and continued to hold the purse-strings with a firm hand, treating all Annibal's threats and fury with

severe contempt. Once only was he tempted to depart from his usual *rôle* of placid indifference, when Fouquier, foaming with rage, had cried out :

"The moment we receive certain news of Brichet's death, I shall sack you, neck and crop, you cursed old rascal, for that day my daughter will be absolute mistress here !"

"And Miss Pauline, do you count her for nothing ?" asked Colard.

"Oh, you can go to the devil, you and your Miss Pauline ! I shall sweep the house clean."

At these words the old man fixed his gray eyes steadily on the Hercules and said to him, in a solemn voice :

"Take care, captain !"

"Oh, indeed ! So you threaten me, do you—idiot ! Ha, ha ! Out with your big sword, you old donkey !"

Colard shrugged his shoulders, and for all answer said :

"Who talks of swords ? With a very little drop of poison one can kill an ox a great deal stronger and bigger than you."

This had been said with an air of such calm determination and a look so dangerous, that Annibal could not help muttering to himself :

"And the old beggar would do it, too !"

Such was the inner life of the Hotel Brichet on the day of Cartouche's execution, when M. de Badieres had sent Colard to the Rue de la Bacherie with orders to give five knocks at a certain door.

After the departure of the valet, the judge, left alone in the little parlor, looked at the clock and concluded that the ladies would probably be in the dining-room. He caused himself to be announced, and found them at table, in company with the captain, who, having

passed the night in a gaming-house, had returned home to eat, his losses at play precluding the possibility of his appeasing his hunger elsewhere. The sublime Annibal was in a very bad humor, and solaced himself by swearing at the servants, while the two girls who sat opposite to him regarded his proceedings with the most perfect indifference.

Feeling an intense repulsion for this wild animal who had taken up his quarters under the paternal roof, Pauline lived as if totally unaware of his existence. She was now dining in his company only because she was already seated at table when he entered; for her repugnance to the man was so intense that, rather than endure his presence, she usually preferred having her meals served in the solitude of her own chamber.

Aurore seemed unconscious of her father's presence. That morning she had received a note which had thrown her into a state of most painful agitation. On its receipt she had retired to the pavilion in the garden, whence she emerged a few hours later, pale and trembling, and a prey to some deadly secret anguish, which rendered her oblivious to all outward things.

As M. de Badieres entered the room, Pauline ran toward him and, embracing him affectionately, drew him to the table, ordering the servants to lay a cover for him. After his sleepless and fatiguing night, the judge felt in much need of sustenance, and gladly seated himself at the table to await Colard's return. Annibal, who was unable to endure the sight of a magistrate with equanimity, subsided into abject silence, even his formidable appetite disappearing in the presence of M. de Badieres.

Despite all her efforts to control herself before her guest, Mme. Brichet could not succeed in distracting her thoughts from the subject that filled her with such

grave anxiety. From time to time she was lost in a deep reverie, and once on recovering herself with an effort, said to the butler :

"Tell Colard I want to see him by and by."

"He is out, madame," replied the man.

"The beast is always out of the way when one wants him," muttered Annibal.

"It is I who am answerable for his absence, madame. I took the liberty of sending him on an errand," said M. De Badieres to Aurore, who accepted the explanation with a little bow and smile.

The party was in the act of rising from the table, when a servant entered and announced the return of Colard.

"Very well, then you will tell him to wait for me here when he has finished all that M. Badieres requires."

And so saying, Mme. Brichet directed her steps toward the garden.

She found her father waiting for her outside.

"Aurore, my dear, have you any little savings you could lend your poor father ?" whined the captain, in a piteous voice.

"Have you ever given me time to make any savings ?" she answered dryly.

"Oh, but think, dear child, you must have two or three louis lying about somewhere !"

Aurore could not repress a slight movement of contempt, which Annibal, mistaking for hesitation, at once tried to turn to his own advantage, and added quickly :

"I will give you back the money. On my word, I will ; the moment that blackguard pays me my pension."

These words awakening some memory in the mind

of Mme. Brichet, she looked coldly at her father, saying in a sarcastic voice :

"Ah ! So you return money now that people have lent you, do you?"

And the captain answered, in a tone of injured innocence :

"Do you doubt the honor of your father, unhappy child ? He who—"

"Then you had better pay the Baron De Cambiac the fifty thousand francs you robbed him of !"

"Where the mischief did the little wretch rake up that old story?" muttered the astonished captain, whom his daughter left standing on the garden stair, where the above conversation had taken place ; but he quickly recovered himself, and watching Aurore enter the pavilion, said to himself : "I should like to know why my dear and very miserly daughter has so often shut herself up in that little house all day."

Descending the stair, Fouquier, too, walked into the garden.

After dinner M. de Badieres had retired to the drawing-room, where he found himself alone, when Colard entered breathless from his mission. The judge, who expected to find Colard a prey to the most painful agitation, was amazed at not seeing the slightest trace of emotion on his features.

"Well ?" asked the judge, inwardly trembling.

"Well, sir, finding the tinsmith's house, I went up to the third story, where, sure enough, was the door with the slide. I gave the five knocks and then—"

"Then the slide was opened cautiously and you gave the password ?" interrupted M. de Badieres.

Instead of answering, Colard looked calmly at the judge and smiled.

"Speak, man!" cried the latter, beside himself with anxiety.

"Then it wasn't a joke, sir?" asked Colard, amazed.

"What?"

"This story of the slide and the name of 'Vivonne' I was to give?"

"Why, did not everything happen just as I told you it would?" said the astonished judge.

"Not at all, sir. I had scarcely given the fifth knock when the door was opened by some one, who roared out: 'You seem to think I'm deaf!'"

"Was it the master of the house?"

"It was, sir."

"Yes, sir, perfectly."

While puzzled at Colard's report of his proceedings, the judge experienced the most heartfelt satisfaction on finding that Cartouche had so cleverly duped him.

"Yes," he said to himself, "the wretch must have known somehow that Brichet and I were the dearest friends, and he thought before dying he would give me this terrible fright."

But his doubts returned when Colard said that the man was known to him.

"You say you knew the man?"

"I should rather think so, sir. I have seen him about this house for many a long year."

"Ah!" exclaimed the magistrate, not having courage to pursue his inquiries; but the valet continued simply:

"I then gave him your extraordinary message, word for word."

"And he agreed to go instantly?"

"Well, sir, he didn't exactly promise that, for he said that before running away he must know the reason why, and to-morrow he is going to your house with his wife and children to ask you, sir."

It would be impossible to describe the blank amazement of M. de Badieres on hearing the announcement.

"What!" he cried, "his wife and children? Then you are not speaking of Brichet."

It was now the turn of Colard to stare at the judge in open-eyed wonder.

"Why, sir, you never thought you were sending me to seek my lamented master!"

"But whom did you see?"

"Chauvel, the slater, who worked here until the fall that disabled him."

"And how long has he lived in that house in the Rue de la Bacherie?"

"Six years, sir."

"M. de Badieres heaved a sigh of relief, now perfectly convinced that Cartouche had merely practiced on his credulity. Feeling that some explanation was due to Colard, he related to him, in a few words all that had happened.

Colard listening intently and exclaiming, from time to time:

"Oh, the villain! Oh, the scoundrel!"

The magistrate had scarcely finished his recital when Pauline entered the drawing-room, and at the same moment Madame Brichet reappeared from the garden, closely followed by the captain, who was grumbling, under his big mustache:

"Ah, my lady, I'll find out what you are up to in that mysterious pavilion!"

"M. de Badieres," said Aurore, "may I now use Colard?"

The judge bowed in reply, and the major-domo at once followed his mistress to a distant corner of the room. She was about to speak to him, when a servant entering, said:

"A gentleman to see the captain."

Aurore, not wishing in the presence of the judge to refuse admission to one of her father's friends, replied :

"Show him in."

A few moments later the door was reopened, and the lackey announced :

"Monsieur le Chevalier de Lozeril."

The chevalier entered with a bold look and haughty mien, one hand on the hilt of his sword. At his name Aurore trembled. Deadly pale, her eyes riveted on the young man, she had totally forgotten her commission for Colard.

CHAPTER VI.

On entering the *salon*, M. de Lozeril at first saw only the colossal figure of the captain. Believing him to be alone, he exclaimed :

" My dear Annibal ! I am going to fight in an hour and I want you as my second !"

A significant look from Fouquier checked De Lozeril, who, seeing he had been imprudent, quickly turned, his eyes falling on the others whom, in his eagerness, he had overlooked. To the right were Aurore and Colard, and on the left, near the windows, M. de Badieres and Pauline. With infinite grace the chevalier saluted first Madame Brichet who, pale and with teeth clenched, scarcely returned his bow, but her eyes, meeting for an instant those of the chevalier, shot forth a gleam of such bitter hate, that the young man said to himself :

" By Jove ! Here 's a pretty woman who is certainly not in love with me !"

Then turning toward Pauline he was struck by her noble and sympathetic beauty.

At this moment Colard, bending respectfully toward Madame Brichet, said in a low voice :

" Madame was about to give me an order."

The chevalier's arrival had evidently changed the intention of Aurore, who replied in the same tone :

"Yes, but a little later, don't go away."

Colard bowed and proceeded to arrange the fire while Madame Brichet, crossing the room, walked slowly in the direction of her father. The prospect of wounds and bloodshed was so enticing for the captain that nothing could have given him greater pleasure than a duel. Delighted at having been chosen for De Lozeril's second, he seized his sword and hat.

"I am at your service, chevalier," he said, hurriedly clasping his sword-belt, but De Lozeril, fascinated by the beauty of Pauline, answered in a low voice:

"Oh, we have lots of time, captain. A circumstance that I will explain to you postpones my duel twenty-four hours."

And so saying, he directed his steps toward Pauline, thinking meanwhile of something agreeable to say to the young lady.

Although the practice of dueling was regarded by the authorities with the utmost indulgence in those days of license, yet M. de Badieres could scarcely, in his capacity of magistrate, countenance the impending combat. Therefore, choosing to ignore all he had heard and desiring to absent himself before anything more decisive should occur, he quietly arose and called for his cloak.

Although the chevalier was apparently a most captivating person, there was, as we have said, something in his manner that inspired an instinctive repulsion, and it was doubtless this feeling that actuated Pauline, on his approach, to whisper to the judge:

"Don't leave me."

At the same moment Madame Brichet had said to her father, in a voice broken by emotion:

"For God's sake, keep that man here!"

The captain's virtues would have been incomplete

had he not possessed, among his other brilliant qualities, the art of seizing on the wing of any occasion that presented itself for the extortion of a few crowns. He, therefore, assumed an aspect of suavity, answering at the same time, in a doleful voice :

"You ask me to do you a favor ! You, who just now refused to give a miserable louis to your unfortunate father !"

"Try to keep your friend here for the rest of the day and I will pay you thirty louis," she said.

"But *when*, beloved daughter?" growled the captain, who liked precision in money matters—in others.

"In an hour."

"Well, spoiled child, of course I must do as you wish," sighed the fond father.

All this did not occupy one-quarter of the time necessary for its narration, and Colard was still arranging the fire, when the judge called for his cloak.

"Yes, M. De Badieres," replied the old servant.

As this name fell on De Lozeril's ear, the chevalier, who was about to address Pauline, turned toward the magistrate and said, with a smile :

"Ah, sir ! I have almost the right to owe you a grudge."

"Why so, chevalier ?" asked the judge, surprised.

"Was it not you who received the confession of Cartouche last night ?"

"It was."

"Well, it was your examination that occasioned the stupid quarrel about which I have come to fetch the captain."

At these words Annibal burst into a loud laugh.

"Oh, no," cried he, "as if De Lozeril was a man to think about one duel more or less ! I have seen him at work often enough to guess how much his adver-

sary's life will be worth. Ah! He has a certain thrust that has always excited my envy."

At her father's words, poor Madame Brichet shuddered, while Pauline affected neither to see nor hear De Lozeril, although she felt that his bold eyes were fixed on her, as he continued gayly:

"Of course, I was only joking, M. de Badieres, and we all owe you a debt of gratitude for your zeal in delivering us from the band of ruffians that followed Cartouche, for I understand that his accusations were very numerous."

"True," replied the judge, "and he not only confessed the murders already known to us, but he also gave us the details of all the others."

"Not all, I think," added De Lozeril, doubtfully.

"Yes, all," maintained the judge.

"Well, so much the better, for I shall be glad to know the end of a most mysterious affair of which I was one night the involuntary witness, and which later looked to me like a murder."

"Where did it happen?" asked M. de Badieres.

"Just about thirty yards from this very house, in the middle of the Rue des Deux Ponts."

"But Cartouche told me nothing about any crime being committed in this neighborhood," said the magistrate, surprised.

"And I am absolutely certain of what I myself witnessed," persisted the chevalier.

"How was it then that you never informed the police?" asked M. de Badieres, assuming, unconsciously, his *rôle* of judge.

"You are right, sir, but instead of answering your question, it will be better for me to relate the whole adventure," and turning to Colard, who now entered with the judge's cloak, De Lozeril said:

"Bring me an arm-chair, my good man."

Colard, obeying, retired to a corner of the room, where he remained, listening to the chevalier's recital. Since the disappearance of his master, the good man was ever on the watch for the merest trifle that might give a clue to his discovery.

"Two years ago," began De Lozeril, "I belonged to the squadron of light dragoons in garrison at Blois, under the command of Captain Fouquier, and had come to Paris on leave of absence. My leave having expired, some of my friends invited me for the last evening to a little supper at a tavern in this neighborhood. When I left them at midnight, I confess my head was pretty heavy; still I was sober enough to know my way to my lodgings. It was a freezing night—"

"Two years ago!" At these words Colard started and Pauline allowed her embroidery to fall from her hands, for that was the very night of Brichet's disappearance.

De Lozeril, remarking the agitation of three of the listeners, turned around to observe if his statement had similarly affected the other two. He again encountered the look of hate flashing from Aurore's beautiful eyes. Her fingers were clasped convulsively, and her great shining eyes were fixed on De Lozeril full of anger and detestation.

"What the deuce can I have done to this woman?" thought De Lozeril, looking toward the captain. But Annibal had fallen into a nap.

The magistrate was the first to recover his equanimity.

"Excuse our emotion, Monsieur de Lozeril," he said. "Your story has awakened a most painful recollection of something that happened in this family at exactly the same time."

"Oh, when I named the precise day, it was merely

to explain that the cold had affected my brain, already somewhat excited by wine. Well, I pursued my way. At the end of this street there is a square where, moved by a tipsy caprice, I sat down on a bench. Overcome by the cold, I was just going to sleep, when a gust of wind caused me suddenly to open my eyes, and I saw a most extraordinary sight. A man, walking so silently that he must have been without shoes, appeared before me, carrying on his back a burden so heavy that he bent beneath the weight."

"Which way did he come?" inquired M. de Badieres.

"I cannot say. When I first saw him he was in the center of the square."

Agitated by a tumult of feeling she could not control, Pauline listened to the chevalier's story with rapt attention. Colard had left his corner and stood gazing at De Lozeril with open mouth, drinking in every word he said, while Mme. Brichet sat silent in her chair, still staring angrily at the narrator. He continued:

"I was dressed in black, and as I sat perfectly still on the bench, the man could not possibly have seen me, when suddenly a drunken fancy came into my head which even now makes me laugh to think of it. The man halted in front of me to rest. Just as he was about to make a new start, I suddenly emerged from my obscurity, crying out:

"'Hello, you rascal, throw down that thing you are carrying and take me up instead, and if you land me at my lodging I'll give you a crown.' And catching hold of the coarse linen wrapper that enveloped his burden, I tried to drag it from his shoulders.

"On hearing a voice behind him, the man fled with a shriek of terror, his bundle falling to the ground."

"In what direction did he run?" cried the judge, eagerly. "This time you must have seen."

"Ah, sir, I no more saw where he went than whence he came."

"But was not the moon shining?" urged his inquisitor.

"Yes; but the man, on taking to flight, let fall his burden, which fell on me and knocked me over."

"Then the unknown man escaped?"

"Yes, and so quickly that when I recovered myself there was not a trace of him. I could not even hear his footsteps."

"He could not have gone very far?"

"No. He must have remained near, watching for my departure. I abandoned all idea of following him, and turned to go home, when I stumbled over the bundle. I pulled aside the cover and started back."

"It was a corpse?" said M. de Badieres, excitedly.

"A corpse! Well, not exactly, for the victim's lips moved convulsively. But if not actually dead, he certainly was next door to it, and must very recently have received the wound that was still bleeding freely."

"Where was he wounded?"

"There, at the base of the neck near the left shoulder, a little to the back."

"Do you think that the man who fled was the assassin?"

"I 'm sure of it; and I am certain he was going to pitch the body into the Seine, never doubting his victim was dead."

"And what did you do to succor the dying man?"

De Lozeril did not reply at once, but, after a little hesitation, went on:

"Well, to tell the truth, I thought no more about him. I was very drunk; and although fear is almost unknown to me, yet on this occasion I was seized with a most overpowering terror on finding myself alone

with this body streaming with blood. Taking to flight, I ran at such a furious pace that I dashed against a man and sent him rolling into the gutter."

"It was doubtless the murderer, who had returned to see what had become of his victim," suggested M. de Badieres.

"I don't know. But the upsetting of that man was my last remembrance of the night's adventure. What happened after I cannot tell, and how I found my inn I know not. The next morning I found myself lying on my bed in all my clothes, and was told by one of the servants that I had been taken up senseless at the door of the house."

"But why did you not go and make a statement before a magistrate?"

"Because, as I have already said, my leave had expired and I was forced to join my regiment. After a few hours of heavy sleep, I was in the saddle, leaving Paris behind me, and I thought no more of my adventure until the following evening, when the whole affair recurred to my memory. So confused was the recollection, however, that I really thought it must be all a dream, and probably to this day I should have looked upon the incident as merely a tipsy inspiration, had not a most startling proof of its reality presented itself."

"What proof?" asked the judge.

"A few moments before leaving Paris I took off the clothes I had worn at the supper and threw them hastily into a valise. On arriving at Blois and taking out my coat, I discovered a large stain of blood on the right sleeve, a most convincing proof that I had not been dreaming, but that I had in reality held in my arms the body of a murdered man. Finally I came to the conclusion that the murder must be attributed to Cartouche; and last night when you took his deposi-

tion, I hoped it would throw some light on this unknown crime, committed two years ago just at the back of this house."

"No, Cartouche mentioned nothing connected with the Ile St. Louis," returned M. de Badieres.

"Nevertheless, the murder did take place," insisted the chevalier, "and at this moment I see distinctly before me the very face of the murdered man."

On hearing this statement the judge started and, rising from his chair, said:

"Colard, quick, a light!"

M. de Badieres drew forth the bracelet which he had taken at the examination of Cartouche. At the sight of this jewel, which had been stolen from her, Pauline could not repress a cry of startled emotion.

"Oh, my beloved father's portrait!"

These words awakened Madame Brichet from the reverie in which she was plunged. She advanced toward the group standing around the table and, fixing her eyes on the bracelet, she murmured in a low voice:

"My husband!"

The commotion had awakened the captain who, stretching himself, asked with a smothered yawn:

"What? Are you speaking of my son-in-law? Have you had any news of him?"

But no one answered, and the judge, handing the bracelet to the chevalier, said in an anxious voice:

"Monsieur de Lozeril, will you have the goodness to say whether the miniature in this locket is the portrait of the man whom you saw dying a few paces from this house?"

On taking the bracelet in his hand, the chevalier cast a rapid glance on the two young women standing before him. On Pauline's countenance he saw nothing but the most agonizing sorrow, but it seemed to him

that a slight shudder convulsed for a moment the face of Mme. Brichet, behind whom appeared the sleepy visage of Annibal. Leaning toward the candle, the young man examined the portrait attentively and in silence. After a minute, which seemed terribly long to those awaiting his verdict, he raised his eyes, and fixing them on Aurore, said, in a calm and steady voice :

"*I do not know this man !*"

When he had drawn near to the light his face was turned away from the judge, but it was fully visible to Colard, and the latter had instantly noted the look of astonishment that passed over the young man's features at the sight of the portrait.

"He has lied !" said Colard to himself

CHAPTER VII.

An hour later the captain and De Lozeril were seated at supper before a sumptuously spread table, in the quarter of the hotel where Annibal had pitched his tent. The worthy captain was in excellent humor, being in possession of the thirty louis promised by Aurore.

"My dear fellow," he said, "the wine is good, the cookery excellent, and we have only to enjoy ourselves."

But De Lozeril made poor response to this hospitable appeal, and though drinking freely, seemed so preoccupied that the captain could not but remark his absence of mind, and said:

"Can it be that the prospect of your duel makes you so dull?"

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Ah, no! But I quite forgot to thank you for consenting to be my second."

"Pray don't speak of it," replied the captain.

"I was thinking this morning," continued the chevalier, "whom I should select, when the Marquise De Brageron said to me: 'Why don't you ask Fouquier, your late captain; he used to be famous at this kind of thing, but perhaps the luxurious life he leads now has demoralized him.'"

"The fact is, I do lead a pretty easy life," replied Annibal, smiling.

"Apparently. The marquise told me that you had married your daughter to an immensely rich man and now lived at his expense in a state of blissful idleness. But she added: 'You could not find a better second than my old friend Fouquier.'"

"Somewhat remarkable that the marquise should call me her old friend, when in her husband's time she was polite enough to declare I was a horrid beast who ruined the character of the marquis," thought the captain, surprised.

"I therefore came here by the advice of this most charming woman," contiuued De Lozeril.

"Oh, ho! most charming woman!" laughed Fouquier. "And so this Iris of intrigue interests herself about your duels, does she? I thought that subject was discussed only by men. You and your charming woman must be uncommonly good friends."

After a moment's hesitation the chevalier answered:

"I believed myself this morning madly in love with her. Now I have changed my mind."

"And yet the marquise is very rich and extremely liberal," said the captain.

"So she is, but she is only a bird in the bush, and I need a more stable arrangement." With which commentary on the morals of the day the chevalier arose from table and seated himself before the fireplace.

Annibal followed his example, saying in a bantering tone:

"My dear fellow, you seem out of spirits to-night, and when one is in low spirits he is usually hard up."

For answer De Lozeril, putting a hand in each pocket, drew forth two immense bundles of bank-notes and placed them on a little table by his side; then

once more plunging his hands into his pockets produced two handfuls of louis.

At this sight Annibal uttered a cry of greedy admiration.

"On my word," said he, "a good round sum."

"Yes, about ten thousand crowns. Since yesterday I have had the most astounding run of good luck. All last night at the Broc d' Or I did nothing but win, and my lucky vein was not exhausted on leaving the tavern, for on going into the gaming house in the Rue des Bons Enfants, I met the Marquis de Brancas, who had just received from the regent twenty thousand francs to quiet the most clamorous of his creditors."

"And you filched it from him ?"

"In a twinkling ; so you see, my friend, the want of money doesn't trouble me."

The sight of so much money apparently fascinated Annibal.

"Why, what 's that ?" he asked, pointing to one of the packets of notes that was pierced through and through.

De Lozeril burst out laughing.

"Oh, that's a little precaution I take whenever I play with the very honest *habitués* of the gaming-house where I met the Marquis de Brancas. One very windy day they conceived the happy idea of opening two opposite windows to produce a strong draft, and the wind carried off my bank-notes to the tune of a thonsand crowns."

"Rather a good idea," was Annibal's inward comment.

"Ever since that day," continued the chevalier, "I take good care when I play for bank-notes invariably to fasten them to the table with this little poniard which you see I always carry. Besides protecting my money from any tricks the wind might play, it is also an excellent preservative against mistakes so often made at

the gaming-table by people who are not quite sure whether money belongs to them or not. That, my dear friend, is the reason why these two bundles of notes are each pierced through and through."

"I wonder," said the captain, still devouring the money with his eyes, "whether a few poor louis I have in my pocket may resist your wonderful luck. Have we time?"

"Plenty of time, captain; for my duel is postponed twenty-four hours to facilitate the payment of a debt due me."

A smile hovered for a moment on the lips of De Lozeril at Annibal's proposal to play, but the latter was so busily occupied in preparing the table that it passed unobserved. The chevalier had been perfectly consistent in stating to Fouquier that he thought no more of the marquise. At the first sight of Pauline he had conceived a passion for her. Not that he thought of utterly abandoning the marquise, for she was too rich a prey to be hastily relinquished, but in his base calculations and eagerness for wealth it had suddenly occurred to him that he might possibly secure the hand of Pauline, and with it, her immense fortune, in which event he could then sacrifice the marquise.

But to the captain and his game of cards. In ten minutes De Lozeril had won all his thirty louis.

"If I am lucky, it is certainly not at play," growled Fouquier.

"Bah! What is it to you whether you win or lose? Is not your position a hundred fold better than mine, however lucky I may be with the cards?"

"My position! What position?" asked the captain, at a loss to know what De Lozeril was driving at.

"Come, come, you are too modest. Your talents are worthy of great admiration."

"My talents!" reiterated the puzzled captain.

"Very clever management, I should say, for you, without fortune, to get into your clutches a son-in-law who is a millionaire."

Annibal burst out laughing, and said:

"Yes! I daresay you give me credit for a genius that I do not possess, but the whole affair was the merest accident. My daughter was in love with a young man to whom I had already promised her. He had even given me a pretty large sum of money."

"What! He gave you money? What do you mean?" asked De Lozeril, in a tone of surprise.

Annibal retrieved himself quickly, saying:

"No, no, I don't mean that. This is how it was: In marrying my daughter I had nothing to give her but—"

Here the captain began to think what it was that he had to bestow on his daughter at her marriage. De Lozeril supplied the words:

"But an honorable name!"

"Yes, yes," cried the captain, "that 's it exactly! I could not, of course, bestow her hand on a young man without fortune. The man she loved, a Gascon, was apparently not rich, and I demanded some proof of his means. He began by putting into my hands a good round sum on account."

"That 's an exhibition of innocence one would hardly expect in a Gascon."

"Oh, indeed! Well, he went away to his own country to realize on his property and bring it back in good gold crowns, but in the meantime Brichet appeared with his millions."

"And, of course, you accepted him, notwithstanding your word to the other man."

"Why not? I was bound before all things to think of my daughter's happiness."

"And a little of your own, eh, captain?"

"Yes, one must think of one's self sometimes in this wretched world."

"Then, when the Gascon came back you returned him his money?"

The captain hesitated, and then replied:

"Oh—yes—certainly I gave it to him, and with very good interest, too."

"Swindler!" said De Lozeril to himself.

"So you see," continued Annibal, "how little I had to do with my daughter's marriage."

"But at least, if your abilities did not procure you a rich son-in-law, they seem to have been available in securing your position on a good solid basis."

"No, indeed; I have done nothing."

"What! You have done nothing for yourself?"

"Well, I did my best to have Brichet make a little will in favor of Aurore, but I don't know whether he ever did it, for just then he disappeared."

"And you have done nothing since?"

"No, that's all."

"Ah, captain, you are indulging in mysteries with your friend."

"But what the devil should I have done?" cried the astonished captain.

"Oh, I see that you want me to assist your memory!"

Annibal laughed, as he replied:

"Tell me what you imagine I may have done, for I am at a loss to know."

"You have murdered Brichet, my dear Annibal," said De Lozeril coldly, looking the captain straight in the eyes.

If the chevalier had expected to terrify Fouquier by this accusation, he was sorely disappointed, for the

captain simply threw himself back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"Then you really think my son-in-law has been murdered?" asked Annibal.

"Did you not hear that tragic story of a murder that I told M. De Badieres?"

"Very little of it, for I was sound asleep, but I woke up in time to hear the end, and that explained all the rest."

"Well, that murdered man, I tell you, was Brichet."

"You don't mean it!"

"I do."

"Then, chevalier, why did you not recognize the portrait when it was shown to you?" asked the captain, suddenly becoming serious.

At this question De Lozeril again looked Fouquier steadily in the face, but the tranquil look of simple curiosity and the utter absence of fear in the captain seemed to disarrange the chevalier's secret plan, and he replied, hesitatingly:

"Because I feared, in recognizing the portrait, to compromise an old friend."

"Oh, oh! My dear chevalier, there you are, beginning your jokes again! Come now, De Lozeril, let us discuss the affair seriously. Brichet neither drank nor gambled; nor had he the courage of a hare. In fact, he was an utter idiot, for whom I wouldn't give that!" And Annibal snapped his fingers. "Now, when one kills a man, it is usually from one of three motives: Revenge, fear or love of gain. Which of these three motives could I possibly have had to rid myself of a being so useful to me? Besides, the good fellow was really too inoffensive to inspire me with the slightest fear, therefore of the three motives, two are already out of the question, fear and vengeance."

"But the third remains, my gallant captain. The love of gain. What have you to say to that?" interrupted De Lozeril, with an evil smile.

"Let us see. I was in the most abject poverty when Brichet came to ask my daughter's hand. I admit that I saw at once the advantage of catching the ball when it lay at my feet, and I made things comfortable for myself by having a clause inserted in the marriage contract, by which I was assured a handsome pension for life, to be paid over to me in any case, whether Brichet lived, died, travelled or disappeared. Therefore, you see I should have gained nothing whatever by sending the good man to another world."

"Nevertheless, he has been murdered."

"In that case, some one else has done it, not I."

"Well, whose interest would it be to suppress your son-in-law? Could it be his daughter Pauline?"

"Oh, no! Much as I detest that girl, I am certain she is absolutely incapable of such a crime!" cried the captain, heartily.

"Or the old valet?"

"Never! He would give his life for Brichet."

"Let us seek elsewhere then," said De Lozeril, slowly, as if weighing his words. "The death of Brichet must have been an advantage to some one."

All at once a light broke on the captain's intelligence.

"By Jove!" said he, "you know how to use the foils, young man, and you can make very pretty feints before you give the real thrust."

De Lozeril assumed an air of amazement.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"I mean to say that you began by accusing the father that you might arrive more surely at accusing the daughter."

"Oh, come, Annibal! How could you conceive it

possible that I should think of such a thing!" exclaimed the chevalier, reproachfully.

But the captain laughed no more. Feeling vaguely that a danger threatened Aurore, a chord of feeling vibrated in his usually callous and brutal nature.

"Well, my friend, seeing that your daughter's name has by accident been introduced, suppose we discuss for a moment her prospects with regard to Brichet," remarked the young man quietly.

"You see very well you are accusing my child," retorted the captain, with a look of angry menace.

"Not at all, I assure you, not at all," declared De Lozeril.

"Whom else, then?"

"That we shall very soon arrive at, if you will only answer my questions. In marrying Brichet, your daughter must have had some settlement?"

"Yes. He put aside a sum of two hundred thousand francs for her own use."

"And for the future, what provision was there?"

"He promised to make a will, leaving her everything, excepting a handsome dowry for Pauline. This will ought to have been drawn the very day of his disappearance, for that morning Brichet was closeted with his notary."

At this answer an evil smile passed over the chevalier's face, and, shaking his head, he cried:

"My word! They were in such a precious hurry to get at the money that they didn't lose much time in killing the old fellow!"

The captain stared in amazement.

"*They*," he said. "Whom do you mean by *they?*"

"Ah, my friend, don't pretend you don't see it!"

"I'll be hanged if I do! What do you mean by your mysterious 'they'?" roared Fouquier.

"Why, don't you see who it was, who thought by killing Brichet he would kill two birds with one stone?"

"Gad! You must tell me, for I give it up!"

"My excellent friend, have you forgotten the Gascon?"

"Gascon! What Gascon?" asked Annibal, taken aback.

"Why, the Gascon to whom you had promised your daughter, to be sure, and who, wishing to regain his lost *fiancée*, took this means of rendering her at once a widow and a millionairess."

The captain stared at De Lozeril in terror, and the latter continued:

"For you see, there is actually no proof that this disappointed lover did not seek to rekindle the flame so brutally extinguished by your throwing him over."

"Rubbish, utter rubbish! Aurore has totally forgotten him, that I swear!" cried Fouquier, outwardly calm, but inwardly tortured by the suspicion the young man's words had aroused.

"Well, captain, it may be rubbish, but you and I know very well that a woman married against her will often retains a warm and secret friendship for some one she likes better than the husband who has been forced on her."

In spite of himself Annibal felt troubled. These words recalled but too vividly to his mind the mysterious visits to that closed pavilion, where that very morning he had been prowling about in hopes of discovering Aurore's secret.

The chevalier had scarcely ceased speaking when Fouquier, rising from his chair, drew himself up to his immense height. Without saying a word he glared darkly and fiercely at the young man seated before

him ; although not understanding the full import of De Lozeril's hints, he yet scented a terrible danger threatening Aurore, and was not slow to perceive that his companion was brewing some deadly mischief.

"Thunder and lightning," he said to himself, "the blackguard is setting an ugly trap for us. Wouldn't it be wise to crush this viper before he has time to bite ?"

To all appearance calm and smiling, the chevalier watched his companion intently, and instantly saw the peril in which he stood.

"Aha," he said to himself, "the sweet Aurore has got the Gascon to murder Brichet, and I have discovered that secret. That's a good card for me to play, unless this ruffian first gives me a knock on the head."

Unfortunately he was not in a condition to parry a knock on the head if the captain were so minded, for his sword lay at the other side of the room, where he had thrown it on entering. He therefore rose, still smiling, and in a leisurely manner walked toward it, but keeping an eye on Fouquier, and quite prepared to elude him by an agile spring should he make any effort to restrain him. But Annibal, absorbed in thought, allowed him to pass without notice.

"One's legs get cramped sitting still so long," remarked the young man, taking a few steps up and down the room and then proceeding carelessly in the direction of his sword.

It was a critical moment, but Annibal did not stir.

"Saved !" thought De Lozeril to himself, turning round to face his companion as he clasped the belt. But Fouquier was no longer there. He had passed swiftly through the door, locking it behind him as he went out, and crying to the chevalier in a mocking tone :

"Have a little patience, my friend. You have told me so many queer stories that I must think them over by myself. I'll come back again," and the sound of Annibal's heavy footsteps died away in the distance.

"Damn it!" said De Lozeril. "I've let myself into a nice trap. The old devil has gone to consult his daughter, and there being no one near to help me, he'll come back presently and cut my throat." And drawing his sword from its sheath, he swished it through the air. "After all," he continued, "with this in my hand, he won't find me a chicken so easy to bleed."

All at once he stood motionless. A faint sound had put him on the alert. He heard some one coming stealthily up the stair. The muffled footsteps paused on the landing, and the door gave a slight crack, as if some one leaned against it, then opened slowly, and a face appeared, pale and anxious.

"Good God! Colard, is that you?" cried De Lozeril, seizing him by the arm.

"God be praised, sir!" ejaculated the trembling major-domo. "You are still alive."

"And why the mischief should you think me dead?"

"Oh, sir, I thought the captain had done something awful, when I passed him he looked so fierce."

"Let me out of this cursed trap as quickly as possible," said De Lozeril. He made a step toward the door, but stopped, changing his mind. "No!" he said resolutely. "By Jove, here I am and here I stay! I shall go through with this affair." And turning to Colard, he said: "So you think the captain capable of murder?"

"Sir, that villain is capable of anything. I have thought so ever since he threatened to turn Miss Pauline out of her own house; for this house belongs to

her, and not to those cursed interlopers who enjoy themselves at her expense."

An expression of such implacable hatred showed itself on Colard's face that the chevalier was inspired by a sudden idea.

"Oh, ho!" he thought. "It appears that the father and daughter are not precisely beloved by this old fool. He may prove useful in helping me to manage Master Annibal."

Assuming an expression of surprise, he said:

"I little suspected the danger I was in; but what I want to know is why the captain should want to kill me."

Colard hesitated an instant; then looking De Lozeril searchingly in the face, answered slowly:

"Because of that portrait shown to you by the judge, that you pretended not to recognize."

"How? Pretended? Why should I have pretended not to know it?"

"Doubtless because you were afraid of accusing the captain."

"Accusing him of what?"

"Of the assassination of my master. If the portrait was really that of the murdered man, there can be no doubt as to the fate of M. Brichet. In that case we should then seek to fasten the crime on those who had an interest in his death."

De Lozeril burst into a loud laugh, saying:

"My good fellow, your devotion to Brichet is turning your brain. The captain has not the slightest idea of the delightful suspicions he inspires."

Not noticing the chevalier's raillery, Colard continued:

"So there was really no resemblance between the portrait and the murdered man?"

"Not the faintest."

"And for these four hours that you and the captain have been shut up here, has he never referred to it?"

"Not by a single word," and De Lozeril pointed to the table, littered with cards, gold and bank-notes. "There!" said he. "If Annibal appeared furious, it was merely rage at his losses, and he is now prabably on his way to get some more money from Mme. Brichet."

"Then why did he lock you in, sir?"

"Oh, that was only forgetfulness; he was doubtless thinking of his bad luck. By the way, Colard, I want you to do me a service. If the captain succeeds in getting some money from his daughter, he will be here with it directly to seek revenge, and we may sit here playing the whole night long. Now I have an engagement elsewhere, and my friend will be exceedingly anxious if I do not return, so I want you to carry a little note explaining my absence."

"Certainly, sir," said the valet, bowing.

Seating himself, De Lozeril wrote:

"Being at this moment in peril of my life, I write this statement, trusting it will be given into the hands of justice in the case of my meeting with a violent death. I shall then have been the victim of Captain Fouquier and his daughter, Mme. Brichet, who thus hope to preserve the secret of the death of M. Brichet, whom they have murdered. Their crime has been revealed to me today by a portrait shown to me by the judge, M. De Badieres, which I declare is the exact likeness of the murdered man, whose story I this day recounted. I did not then confess the truth, because I was actuated by a feeling of leniency toward those who now wish to take my life."

"Take this," he said, handing it to Colard.

The old man turned the missive from one side to another, seeking the address.

"True," said De Lozeril, "I have not addressed it, because if you were to lose it and it should be found, the person for whom it is intended would be compromised. I will confide the name to your discretion as an honorable man. You know the Hotel de Brageron?"

"Yes, sir; Rue St. Honore."

"This note is for the marquise, and you will place it in her own hands."

"Immediately, sir," and Colard hastened to the door, but De Lozeril stopped him.

"No," he said, "don't go yet; it is possible that it may not be necessary to deliver the letter at all, for if our game does not last more than another hour I shall rejoin my friend."

"Very well, sir."

"The letter is, therefore, only to be delivered should I be detained here to an unreasonable hour. If we do not get through at midnight, you can go on your errand."

"Go now, my good fellow, but turn the key in the lock after you go out, just as you found it. I shall have a good laugh at the captain for locking me in. He boasts that play never makes him lose his head."

Colard was just outside the door when the sound of a heavy footstep was heard on the stair.

"It 's the captain," whispered Colard, "he will meet me on the stair."

"He must not suspect that you have been here," cried De Lozeril, calling Colard back into the room.

Colard hastily re-entered and went straight toward a certain corner as if to find an exit there.

"Where are you going? Is that the way you escape?" cried the young man, surprised.

The question appeared to confuse Colard, and he

stopped. Then turning back, he again left the room, closing and locking the door.

As he disappeared, De Lozeril exclaimed gleefully :

"There, it 's done ! The good man little thinks he is carrying a paper which, if it does not save, will at least avenge me !"

Then, suddenly recalling the strange actions of Colard while in the room, it occurred to him to examine the corner toward which Colard had gone. Going to the wall, he tested carefully the woodwork. But it was intact, and there was apparently no secret door. Hearing the approach of the captain, the chevalier abandoned his search, and, after walking to the fire-place, leaned his back on the chimney-piece, sword in hand. The door opened and the captain appeared. Having prudently calculated the chance of a sudden attack, he, too, carried a rapier in his hand. At sight of the young man, Annibal burst out laughing.

"Oh, ho !" he cried. "What are you doing here, all alone, with your sword in the air, my very dear friend ?"

"I am killing the time, most amiable captain ! May I, too, ask the use of that shining blade over which you so playfully pass your finger ?"

"Do you really want to know, beloved chevalier ? Well, I have been thinking that before retiring to my virtuous couch I should like to complete my second dozen of those who have done me the honor to let me kill them in a duel."

"I see. You want to kill me before you go to bed to-night !"

"Just so ; and as I should like to retire early, I hope that you will immediately procure for me this satisfaction."

And, sword in hand, Annibal fell into position.

But De Lozeril, instead of following his example, said with a laugh :

"Although you are in such a precious hurry to get to bed, I suppose you will give me time to ask a question."

"Certainly, chevalier, speak !"

"I wish you would tell me why you have fixed on me to complete your second dozen."

"Simply for the sake of friendship."

"Indeed !"

"Pure friendship," repeated Annibal, "for I am anxious to cure you of a very grave malady."

"And what do you call this malady ?"

"I call it curiosity, my dear friend. Yes, you have the wretched habit of continually poking your nose in other people's affair."

"And doubtless it is your daughter who suggested this means of stopping me ?"

"Not at all. Madame Brichet knows nothing of my humane project."

"But when you left me, I understood you were going to consult your daughter."

"Such was my intention, and I made straight for the pavilion, but I found doors and windows closed and Madame Brichet shut up inside."

"Shut up ! *Alone ?*"

To this question, accentuated with a sarcastic smile, Annibal answered dryly :

"You are too inquisitive, my dear friend. Another fit of your malady is coming on." So saying, the captain again stood on guard, adding :

"Come ! Let us begin your cure at once."

But De Lozeril remained stationary behind the massive table, which sheltered him from any sudden attack his enemy might make.

"But, my dear Annibal, if you did not see your daughter, who then put it into your head to send me to a better world?"

"Who? A most excellent counselor, named Prudence, dear friend."

"How so?"

"What! Is it not prudent to prevent your gossiping to other people?"

"Yes. If other people really knew nothing."

"And how the devil should they know?" cried the astonished Fouquier.

"How do you know that a paper signed by me may not have informed other people of your motive for killing me?"

At this answer Annibal remained for a moment dumfounded; then bursting into a laugh, he cried:

"Ah, ha! I was very nearly taken in by your transparent humbug. I forgot that when you came into this house you had not the slightest expectation of seeing that portrait on which you have based all your suppositions, and that being the case why should you have warned your friends before coming here?"

Very well put, captain; but supposing I have taken the precaution since I have been in this house?"

"Yes, but I had locked you in. Perhaps your guardian angel may have come down the chimney and taken your letter!"

"Well, it may have been my guardian angel, as you say, but all the same the letter has gone."

"Bah! You can tell that to the marines, my dear sir."

"You refuse to believe me?"

"Absolutely, chevalier. So much so, that if you still refuse to fight I shall simply kill you like a dog," and the captain advanced sword in hand.

De Lozeril, seeing that further argument was useless, left the sheltering table and faced his adversary.

"All right," said he; "but remember you have forced my hand, for we might easily have come to an understanding."

Each made a step forward, and their swords touched. The two men were both proficient in the art of fencing. Young, active and supple, De Lozeril harassed the captain on all sides, parrying his thrusts with amazing agility, while Fouquier stood immovable on his giant limbs, merely protecting himself from his enemy's sword with admirable *sang-froid* and watching eagerly to avail himself of the slightest advantage the chevalier might give him. On a certain thrust being made by the latter, Annibal cried, while parrying:

"I know that trick! It is of the Spanish school!"

"True," answered De Lozeril, in his turn parrying.

"And, if I am not mistaken, it was invented by the famous Roxas Diego."

"He was my best master," replied De Lozeril, hoping to frighten the captain. "Did you know him?"

"Well, a little, I killed him," answered Annibal modestly, still parrying.

This information was thrown away on De Lozeril who, despite his wonderful address, had discovered that Fouquier was immensely his superior in the art. At each new attack the captain advanced a step while his enemy retreated, and the combat, begun on the threshold, had been prolonged until they had almost reached the opposite side of the room, so that it was inevitable that the chevalier must soon find himself with his back against the wall.

"I shall soon be pinned to the wainscot by this great hulking brute," thought he, fighting with desperate energy.

Blow after blow he dealt the captain, hoping to make him retreat, but all to no purpose ; and, in his despair, he gave Annibal the opportunity of giving him a terrible thrust which, however, he parried just in time.

The situation was horrible, and De Lozeril felt his strength giving way, while Annibal seemed as fresh as ever. The captain watched the young man's declining forces with satisfaction, saying with a little laugh :

" Ha, ha, my sweet friend, I don't think it will be much longer before I go to bed !" and suddenly making a rapid thrust, he attempted to pin the chevalier to the wall, crying : " Good night, De Lozeril !"

But the young man, springing aside with surprising agility, the captain's sword encountered nothing but the wainscot, where it remained. At the same moment De Lozeril lowered his sword, saying :

" Captain, I will give you two hundred crowns for every minute you allow me to rest ; meantime, I beg you to listen to what I have to say."

At this extraordinary proposition Annibal, who was about to renew the fray paused, saying :

" That seems to me a delightfully reasonable proposal. You said three hundred crowns, didn't you ?"

" No, two hundred."

" I thought you said three hundred."

" Well, then, let us say three hundred," replied De Lozeril, knowing that he must give in and pay the price exacted by his conqueror.

" All right then, dear friend, but first have the goodness to consult the clock behind you."

" Five minutes past eleven," said the chevalier.

" Very well, now your account is opened, you may speak."

CHAPTER VIII.

De Lozeril sat down and took breath. Fouquier watched the hand of the clock, and De Lozeril began :

"My dear captain, we must start from this point, that if no one of our acquaintances has murdered Brichet, the man is none the less dead, for I declare I have held him dying in my arms."

"Admit that some one has relieved me of my son-in-law," said Fouquier, graciously waving his hand.

"Now," pursued the chevalier, "the day that his death is proved, what will happen ?"

"My daughter will handle his millions, of course."

"Then you think it will be all plain sailing. You have never considered one question. Why did Brichet go away ?"

"Why ? Why ?" repeated the captain, trying to find an answer. Then suddenly starting as if he foresaw danger, he cried out : "True ! Why the devil did the idiot go away ?"

"Happy, prosperous, deeply in love with his young wife, at an age to enjoy the comforts of home, is it not probable that his journey was simply a pretext to throw you all off the scent ?"

"Then you think that he never set out ?"

"I don't think he can have gone very far," replied De Lozeril.

These hints made an impression on Annibal, who sat ruminating, his chin resting in his hand.

"Upon my word, that's quite true, and I never thought of speculating on why the old donkey went away. I simply believed the story of a journey."

"Well, perhaps we shall yet find the clue to the mystery. Now, let us admit that Madame Brichet had a—friend. Let us further admit that your son-in-law had found out about this—friendship, as other husbands have done before him, and wishing to ascertain the truth, pretended to go on a journey, only to come back secretly and surprise the—friend?"

"Great Heavens!" cried Fouquier.

"And supposing," went on De Lozeril, "that, coming back, he was assassinated by some one, a person who had nothing whatever to do with the question—Cartouche, for instance, or one of his gang. This exploit would, of course, secure the inheritance of Brichet to the person designated in his will."

"And that person is my daughter," said the captain, quite happy again.

De Lozeril shook his head slowly.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked.

"How could it be any one else?"

"How do you know that Brichet, between the moment of his discovery and his death may not have changed his will out of revenge?"

The captain gasped with fright, crying:

"Then Aurore's golden prospects would crumble into dust!"

"And the money would go to Pauline?"

"And all the millions of the old fool would escape us! We should get nothing!" roard Annibal, beside himself with rage and apprehension.

After a few seconds of silence, De Lozeril continued;

"You might do better than that. You might get half."

"And who would give us the half?"

The chevalier came quite near Annibal, and, speaking with emphasis, said:

"*I.*"

The captain burst out laughing.

"So that 's what you have been driving at all this time, my boy! And how, pray, will you secure to me the half?"

"By a simple process. Cause me to marry Pauline."

"And do you think I have the slightest influence over that simpering fool?"

"No, captain; but you and I are two clever men of the world, and surely we might find some means of so compromising the girl that she would find it impossible to refuse me?"

Annibal scratched his ear uneasily.

"Perhaps, after all, you are taking me in, for if Brichet should not have altered his will I should still be obliged to give you the half."

"Well, then, in that case, give me a pension, for instance, the same sum that Brichet settled on you."

"And you would be contented with that?" asked Fouquier, hesitatingly.

"On my word of honor."

"But I think I should like to have that in writing."

Far from being offended at the captain's want of faith, De Lozeril answered immediately:

"You shall have it to-morrow."

"Why not now?"

"Because it would be useless if, to-morrow morning, I am killed in my duel."

"Duel! What duel?" cried Annibal, astonished.

"Don't you remember that my coming here was to

ask you to be my second at a meeting that was only delayed some hours to enable my adversary to pay me a debt of honor?"

"Yes, yes; I do remember now, but I never asked you the name of this adversary."

"The Baron De Cambiac."

Taken aback at this name, Annibal could not repress an exclamation:

"Bah! that is my Gascon!"

These words were a revelation to De Lozeril, who said to himself:

"It is clear that the baron is Aurore's lover. Women have an infallible instinct in scenting out a rival, and I see now why Madame De Brageron insisted that I should come here and ask Annibal to be my second. She wanted me to get into the camp that I might study its defenses."

The captain too was deep in reflection, and after much deliberation arrived at the following decision:

"If De Lozeril should rid me of that cursed Cambiac to-morrow, I should not then be under the necessity of reimbursing him for his fifty thousand francs."

Their meditation ended. The two men looked each other steadily in the eyes.

"Then we are agreed, captain, are we not?"

"Yes, on condition that you sign me that little document."

"I shall sign it to-morrow. So now we are real friends," added De Lozeril holding out his hand.

"Excuse me," said Fouquier, "but you know the proverb, 'Short accounts make long friends,' and I think you and I have a little account to settle."

"True," cried De Lozeril, looking at the clock.

"You have spoken twenty minutes, which, at *four* hundred crowns the minute, makes—"

"No, no, captain, hold on! We agreed for *three* hundred crowns."

"Really? Very well, that makes six thousand crowns."

The chevalier approached the table, took one of the bundles of bank-notes that was pierced through and handed it to Annibal.

"Here is the money," he said.

The captain looked with a melancholy air at the hole perforating the precious packet.

"Do you think that the notes being mutilated will decrease their value?" asked the chevalier, pocketing the gold and the rest of the bank-notes that covered the table.

'Oh, no," sighed Annibal, "I know the notes are perfectly good, only the sight of that hole reminded me that I was on the very point of running you through in the same way."

"And you would have been a great fool for your pains, my dear friend; for, in the first place, you would have run the risk of losing your inheritance; and, in the second, you would have laid yourself open to endless trouble, resulting from a certain little letter whose existence you choose to discredit."

Fouquier burst into a loud laugh.

"Yes," he cried, "we know all about that—the letter your guardian angel came down the chimney to fetch. You don't think I 'm going to swallow that rubbish?"

"Do you really persist in denying the existence of that letter?"

"I don't believe one single word of it."

"Very well, my dear captain, if you will have the goodness to accompany me downstairs, I shall endeavor to convince you."

"Done!" cried Annibal, gayly, who, before leaving the room, laid his packet of perforated bank-notes on the mantel.

The two men passed out. No sooner had Annibal closed the door, than a panel in the woodwork suddenly opened and some one hastily entered the room, walked to the mantel and seized the bundle of notes.

Having reached the vestibule, the captain and De Lozeril found Colard sitting on the bench, sound asleep, his lantern by his side. He was awakened by the chevalier saying :

" My good man, kindly give me that letter. You see, I find myself at liberty before the hour named."

" And I own I am not sorry," replied the old man, half asleep, " for at my age I am not good at sitting up late," and he handed the letter to De Lozeril, who put it into his pocket.

" Faith, it was true then," thought the captain. " But how the mischief did that old ape find his way to the chevalier ?"

De Lozeril pursued his way along the Quai to the Rue des Deux Ponts, the street he had traversed two years before, on the night of the murder. Every detail of the drama recurred vividly to his memory.

" A few paces more and I shall reach the very square where I saw the man with the sack." Another moment and he was there, but this time the square, instead of being illumined by the moon, was dark. He tried to recall each incident of the adventure. " Yes, it was just here," he said. " There is the bench where I sat down and the man with the sack appeared before me. Then I got up, and staggering toward him, I—"

The young man had not time to complete his reminiscences, for a steel grip was on the back of his neck, and before he could make the slightest resistance a dagger was buried between his shoulders.

De Lozeril uttered a piercing shriek and fell forward, lifeless !

CHAPTER IX.

We have already stated that the garden of the Hotel Brichet was bounded on one side by the old Rue St. Louis. Aurore, wishing to exclude from her fairy bower the view of somber and dilapidated houses, had closed up the windows of her pavilion that looked out on the street. But, had Madame Brichet, after the lapse of two years, cared to reopen one of those windows, she would have been surprised at the changed appearance of one of the houses facing it. With fresh paint, clean windows and the façade restored to its original beauty, it seemed to have decked itself with youth and gayety and stood forth in vivid contrast to its neighbors.

The poor of this vicinity were not slow in finding their way to this house, where at all hours they were sure to find an open door, on which were painted the words, "Doctor Maurice Gardi."

To them the doctor was ever ready to lend a willing ear and helping hand, often supplementing his prescriptions with the gift of a crown, bestowed with so much good will that his kindly benevolence proved as efficacious a cure as his skillful treatment.

Maurice Gardi was about thirty years of age, tall and elegantly formed, a handsome, genial and forcible man.

The young doctor had not always been in a condition

to give gratuitous care to his poor patients. It was not long since he had been in sore need himself. At that time he inhabited only the garret of the house which he now possessed, living in poverty and obscurity until the death of an uncle in Burgundy gave him a moderate fortune.

Maurice regarded his newly-acquired wealth more as a means of extending his benevolence than of satisfying selfish wishes, and, adhering to his frugal tastes, he devoted himself more ardently to the practice of his profession, in which he made rapid progress.

No sooner was he independent of patients than they crowded in from every quarter, including many persons of fortune, able to reward his skill with handsome fees.

The house consisted of a ground floor and one story, surmounted by a garret. The lower part was occupied by the kitchen, dining-room and a large consulting chamber, where Maurice received his poorer clients. The first floor was devoted to his bedroom and study, whence there was a charming view of the flowers and verdure of Madame Brichet's garden.

The young doctor evidently enjoyed this pleasing prospect to the full, for, not content with admiring it from his own rooms, he would mount to the garret and there, looking through a chink of the closed blind, he would gaze with rapt attention on the garden of the Hotel Brichet.

Maurice Gardi was madly in love with Pauline Brichet.

The young people had never exchanged a word, yet Pauline felt that Maurice loved her, while he could not misunderstand the tell-tale blushes that glowed on Pauline's face at every meeting. The sweetest recompense for his mute devotion was when, on Sunday morning, mass being over, she laid her trembling little fingers

in his hand to take from him the holy water. This was absolutely the only intercourse between the lovers, yet so subtle and magnetic an instinct is love, that each filled entirely the heart of the other. The care of the sick and poor was one strong bond of sympathy between them, Pauline recommending her sick pensioners to the doctor's care, while to those in want of food and raiment he would say :

"Apply to Mademoiselle Brichet."

If Maurice mounted to the garret twenty times a day in the hope of catching a transient glimpse of a white-robed figure among the paths of the garden, Pauline every evening, before saying her prayers, would lift a corner of her blind and watch for a moment the lamp that lighted the young doctor's study.

So kind and sympathetic was the nature of the man, that even the impregnable Colard was obliged to surrender to his genial smile, and the old man, who defended his young mistress with a kind of bulldog fidelity, was forced to yield to the charm of his winning voice and manner.

One day on their return from mass, on passing the doctor's door, he said :

"That is the house of an honest man."

"Ah, is that really your opinion, my good Colard ?" answered Pauline, with a little tremor in her voice.

"If I had a daughter, I should like her to have just such a husband," pursued the steward, who, engaged in opening the door, escaped the grateful look that Pauline threw toward him. Praise from so severe a censor proved that the doings of Maurice had long been watched with careful interest by the old man. But the time came at last when the silence of the lovers was destined to end, and it happened on the very same day as the event described in the preceding chapters.

When De Lozeril, after finishing his story of the murdered man, had left M. de Badieres in the drawing-room in order to follow the captain, the judge, too, prepared to make his adieux ; but Pauline, addressing him in her sweet voice, said :

" M. de Badieres, will you give me your arm to the house of one of my poor pensioners who lives close by ?" and the magistrate, gladly acquiescing, they started, followed by Colard, carrying a huge basket.

On arriving at the house, Pauline bade adieu to M. de Badieres, and quickly running upstairs, reached the top before poor old Colard with his heavy basket had mounted to the first floor. Pushing open the door, she saw a man in the act of trying to raise the invalid in her bed. He was saying :

" Come now, my good woman, just one little effort and we shall succeed. You see my left arm is not very strong since a fall I had in the middle of the night two years ago when a man running like a madman pushed against me with such force as to upset me."

" You ! Was it really you ?" cried Pauline, involuntarily, thinking at once of De Lozeril's story.

At her exclamation Maurice turned around quickly and saw Pauline on the threshold.

She was really a charming picture standing there, the door forming a frame, and the dark staircase behind her making a background that threw out the perfect outline of her slender and graceful figure. Her pretty head was partly enveloped in a black hood, from which escaped a mass of blonde curls, while her rapid ascent of the stairs had sent a mantling color to her cheeks. She looked, indeed, the very perfection of adorable girlhood.

Confused by the unexpected meeting with the man whose image filled her heart, she stood there

hesitating to enter, her lovely eyes fixed timidly on him.

At this captivating apparition, Maurice was too much overcome to speak for a moment, but not wishing to add to Pauline's embarrassment, he quickly recovered himself and answered :

"Yes, mademoiselle, it was I. Have you heard of this affair of two years ago ?"

"Yes, only an hour since, from the very man who knocked you down," replied Pauline, her sweet voice going straight to Maurice's heart, who now heard her speak for the first time.

At this moment Colard appeared, panting from the exertion of mounting the five stories so easily accomplished by Pauline.

At sight of the two young people, Colard had just a shadow of suspicion that this might have been a rendezvous, but the innocent candor of his young mistress soon put his doubts to flight, and gazing at the two with beaming admiration, he murmured to himself :

"They would make a handsome pair."

Then turning to Maurice and putting down his basket, he respectfully bade him good morning.

Leaving the contents of the basket, Pauline prepared to take leave after a few words of consolation to the poor woman.

"Come soon again, my dear young lady," sighed the invalid, comforted by Pauline's sweet presence.

"Oh, yes, Françoise, I shall come again."

"But when, mademoiselle ?"

Pauline was about to answer: "To-morrow," but suddenly reflected that Maurice, who was standing by, listening, might regard this as a rendezvous ; invoking with her eyes the help of Colard, the old man hastened to say ;

"All right, Françoise, it is understood that mademoiselle will come again as soon as possible, and in the meantime we leave you in the doctor's hands, whose skill will do you much more good than all our visits."

On reaching the street, Colard suddenly exclaimed :

"How did the doctor say he had hurt his arm, mademoiselle ?"

"He said he was the person upset that night by Monsieur de Lozeril, in his flight from the murdered man."

At this answer Colard started and turned pale.

"Another clue !" he cried.

"What do you mean, Colard ?"

"I mean that we must omit nothing that might possibly put us on the track that I have so long been seeking in vain. Who knows if this little incident of the doctor's fall may not guide us to it ?"

"My poor father !" sighed Pauline.

No sooner had Colard seen his mistress safely home than he hurried to the doctor's house.

"No," he said to himself, as he knocked at the door, "I must neglect nothing."

He was admitted by Maurice himself.

"Mademoiselle is not ill ?" asked the doctor.

"No, no, sir ; don't be alarmed," said Colard who, despite his trouble, could scarcely repress a smile.

"I feared that some sudden accident might have sent you here."

"Yes, Monsieur Gardi, it is an accident that brings me to you ; only this accident occurred two years ago."

"Why, what do you mean ?" asked the astonished doctor.

And Colard explained in a few words the object of his visit, begging Maurice to give him any further information in his power.

The young man told him all that had happened, corroborating to the full, so far as he was concerned, the statement of De Lozeril, and Colard remarked:

"Yes, all that agrees with the story that we heard this afternoon."

"What story?"

"A young man, who came to call, told us a story about a murder, of which I should not have believed a single word if your testimony had not agreed with that part of the tale."

"Why would you not believe it?"

"Because the gentleman himself admitted that he was very tipsy at the time, and he might have taken for sober reality what was merely a drunken imagination, and besides, I said to myself, if this murder had really been committed, the body would have been found, for according to his story it was left lying in the middle of the square. Now, no one whom I ever heard of found this body. You, yourself, saw nothing of it. Did you?"

"No, nothing."

"And yet you must have passed through the square on your way home a quarter of an hour later?"

"Yes, but I tell you I saw nothing. I was half dead with sleep, and only thought of getting to my bed."

"And you never heard it said anywhere, did you, that a corpse had been picked up in the square?" persisted Colard.

All at once Maurice, striking his forehead, exclaimed:

"Yes, hold on! I do remember something. The next morning, on going out very early to visit a patient, I met the patrol with a body, which they were carrying to the river's side, so as not to leave it lying in the open street, exposed to the public gaze."

"And they picked it up in the square?"

"I declare I never thought of asking. All I heard was that a man had been murdered in the night, and on seeing the body laid on the bank of the river I offered my services, but he was already past human aid, having been mortally wounded in the neck. A police-officer was busy making a statement of the incident."

"Do you think he knew the name of the victim?" asked Colard, who had listened with profound attention.

"He did not, for the man carried no papers nor any sign of identification. At that time Cartouche and his band were holding the town in a state of terror, and the police, not wishing it to be known how utterly powerless they were against these brigands, kept all affairs of this kind as dark as possible. Acting on this motive, the officer, the moment I had certified to the man's death, hastened to cry, 'Come, my men, let us get this corpse to St. Paul's Charnel-house!"

Colard here raised his head, which had sunk upon his breast during the doctor's recital.

"Would it be possible to recognize that corpse now?" he asked.

"How could you think of such a thing, Colard? Imagine, among hundreds of bodies, heaped on one another, to say nothing of the decomposition that must have taken place in two years!"

"No trace, still no trace! I shall have to give up all hope of ever finding my beloved master," and Colard retired, despairingly.

By this time night had come on, and Colard, entering the garden by the little door, found himself in perfect darkness. He gained the garden stair just at the moment when Annibal came down, muttering to himself as he passed:

"Ah! Master De Lozeril, you try to poke your nose into other people's concerns without thinking that you are risking your life thereby!"

"Can he have murdered the chevalier?" thought Colard, with a shudder on hearing these words.

And, as we have already seen, he lost no time in mounting to Fouquier's room, where he found the chevalier locked in.

Maurice, on Colard's departure, remained buried in a reverie so long and deep that when he recovered himself his clock was striking midnight and his lamp was almost extinguished. He opened the window, and saw that something most unusual was occurring in the Brichet mansion. On the second story a light passed and repassed the windows, while a loud and furious voice poured forth a volley of oaths. At the same instant, at his very feet, a bright light flashed through the darkness of the street and then a dull sound was heard.

"Some one has jumped from the window of Madame Brichet's pavilion," said Maurice to himself.

Two minutes later a horrible cry of agony resounded through the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER X.

"Good God!" exclaimed Maurice. "That means murder!" and in another moment he had lighted a lantern and rushed into the street. In the center of the square he stumbled over a body.

Enveloped in his cloak, the victim lay stretched upon the ground, his face on the pavement, while from his neck flowed a stream of blood.

"He is not dead; I must do my best to save him," thought Maurice.

He ran to his house and secured all that was necessary to stanch the wound, and hastened back to the square.

But the body was no longer alone. During his short absence the officer of a passing patrol, seeing a black mass stretched on the pavement, had ordered a halt and was examining the body. At the sound of the doctor's approach, the soldiers turned toward him.

"Ah! It is the doctor who saved my mother's life!" cried the sergeant, heartily.

"Is that you, Germain? Just get your men to carry this poor fellow to my house."

The sergeant gave the order, and his men, lifting their burden, set out, Maurice walking in front, the sergeant at his side carrying the lantern.

"So, doctor, you discovered the body before we came up?" he inquired.

"I was at my window when I heard him shriek. I ran to the place as quickly as I could, returning home only to fetch my instruments."

"And you saw nothing of the assassin?"

Suddenly there crowded into Maurice's mind the recollection of the few moments before he heard that cry, the flashing lights in the pavilion, the dull thud of one falling to the ground, the commotion and violent language on the second story of the Hotel Brichet; but the thought of Pauline kept him silent. Not that it was at all probable that any one inhabiting that house was implicated in the murder, but a judicial investigation would necessarily ensue, causing Pauline much uneasiness and trouble. So to the sergeant's question he merely answered:

"No, I only heard him running away."

"Which way?"

"Toward the opposite side of the island. You must have met him."

"The only man we met was a gentleman whom I know by name, a person absolutely incapable of such a crime; besides, it was just at a point where two streets meet, and it was impossible to say from which direction he came. He was the Baron de Cambiac, and I shall not even mention him in my report."

Maurice had listened to the sergeant without paying much attention, his mind being still absorbed by the thought of all he had heard and seen in the Hotel Brichet just before the crime. He tried to persuade himself that he had been mistaken, and that in the

darkness he had imagined that the sudden light came from the pavilion, when it had in reality proceeded from a greater distance. At this moment the soldiers halted before his house. They were just about to enter when the sergeant exclaimed: "Hallo! What 's that shining on the road over there?" and, crossing the street, made straight for the pavilion, picked up the object lying just beneath one of the windows, and said gayly :

"It 's not a piece of money, but it 's silver all the same and worth the trouble of keeping. See!"

"It is a broken spur," said Maurice.

"It will fetch me the price of a good bottle of wine," added the soldier, pocketing his treasure.

The doctor had the wounded man carried to his own room, where, assisted by the sergeant, he proceeded to undress him. On removing his vest a shower of gold fell from its pockets like rain on the floor.

"My word! He was worth killing!" cried the sergeant, gathering up the scattered pieces.

Without delay Maurice probed the wound, and under the pain of the operation a slight shudder passed over the patient.

"He is young and strong, and may possibly pull through," thought the doctor, closing the wound. This done, he turned and saw the sergeant calmly seated at the table, pen in hand and a sheet of paper before him, waiting.

"What are you going to do, sergeant?" said Maurice.

"I want to make out my report, sir."

"Do you mean to say you are going to question the wounded man?"

"Why, certainly."

"Well, I think you will have a long time to wait for

that. It may be many hours before he comes to himself, if, indeed, he ever does so."

"But, sir, I must make out my report for the *commissaire*."

"Well, just write down what you have done and seen, and if he ever should regain consciousness, you may be sure I would not be slow in letting the police know."

"But I wanted to make a good-big report. The gentleman seems to be a swell, and his people are most likely rich, and I should have had a handsome reward," said the soldier with a sigh, as his golden dream vanished.

"Oh, by the way, that reminds me," said Maurice. "We ought to inform the parents or friends of this young man."

"But when he can't tell us his name!"

"Perhaps, though, he has some papers about him that may enlighten us."

"True, true!" cried the sergeant, who, taking up the clothes that had been thrown on a chair, proceeded to search the pockets. He pulled out a small cornet.

"Ah! See, his name is Chevalier de Lozeril," said he, reading the words inscribed in gold letters on the morocco cover. And returning to the search, he drew forth the bundles of bank-notes. "Great Heavens," he cried in amazement, "he must have captured the mines of Peru!"

"Perhaps this large sum may have tempted the murderer to his crime," said Maurice.

"Then, after wounding him, he had no time to seize the booty," added the sergeant; then all at once he burst out laughing.

"What is it?" asked Gardi.

"Don't you see, sir? He was going to make garlands

with his bank-notes, for they are all run through as if he thought of threading them on a string !"

And for the third time the sergeant returned to the wounded man's pockets.

"Ah, here is a letter !' he cried, as he felt a paper rustling beneath his fingers.

"Quick, let 's see the address !" said Maurice, eagerly.

"There is none," said the soldier, disappointed, turning the letter over and over in his hands. He hesitated for a moment as to whether he should open it or not, but decided on leaving it intact, saying : "I shall send it in with my report just as it is, and the *commissaire* can do what he likes with it."

CHAPTER XI.

As the Parisian public believed itself delivered by the death of Cartouche from all recurrence of the nightly horrors that had of late been its constant terror, it may be imagined that great consternation was produced by the news of the outrage committed on the very night succeeding the brigand's execution. Even a fortnight after the event it was still on the lips of every one, and "The affair Lozeril-Brichet" bade fair to monopolize public attention for many a long day. Much praise was awarded to the police for the promptness shown in arresting, without delay, the two suspected persons, and in keeping them closely imprisoned in separate dungeons of the Chatelet. A letter found on the wounded man had greatly facilitated the action of the police who, after its perusal, had little to do beyond arresting the two individuals named therein. But to the scandal-mongers, the most interesting part of the story lay in the fact that this crime had merely been committed in order to mask a former one, which up to the present had remained undiscovered. It was hoped that the veil would at last be lifted, enshrouding the mystery of the fate of the unfortunate Brichet, now believed to have been foully murdered by Fouquier and his daughter, and who, by the further death of De

Lozeril, had hoped to destroy forever all trace of their previous crime.

Ignoring entirely the serious charges brought against them, the two culprits simply denied everything.

The mode of procedure in those days differing widely from the present usage, the accusation and all proofs discovered by justice were kept a profound secret until the trial of a prisoner, when the evidence produced in open court had often the effect of a thunderbolt falling at his feet.

In the present instance the antecedents of the elder culprit were the most deplorable. A drunkard, gambler, assassin, always in want of money and obtaining it by the most discreditable means, even such as to have caused his expulsion from the army, it was easy to believe him capable of any crime. For the younger, the most malignant scandal-mongers finding little to say against her, consoled themselves with the saying, as trite as it is untrue, "Like father, like daughter."

At the same time much commiseration was felt for Pauline Brichet, and it was a matter of surprise to many that the poor girl had not also fallen a prey to these two who had begun their iniquities by murdering her father.

But even greater pity was felt for the unfortunate De Lozeril, who was still in the most extreme peril, despite the unceasing care of Doctor Gardi, in whose house he remained.

After three days of utter unconsciousness, a glimmer of returning intelligence had shown itself, and the doctor, following the instructions received from the police, had instantly summoned M. De Badieres.

"Do you know me, M. De Lozeril?" asked the judge, seating himself at the sufferer's bedside.

The chevalier replied by an affirmative sign of the head.

"You are aware that your would-be murderers are now in the hands of justice and that they will be punished?"

"Do you know who they are, then?" whispered the sick man, painfully.

"Why, did you not name them yourself before the act?"

On seeing a look of blank amazement on De Lozeril's face, the judge tried to assist his memory, and added:

"I 've found on you the letter you had written, foreseeing that this misfortune might overtake you."

But the chevalier's memory had not yet fully returned, and the judge's words only brought back to him a confused recollection of the letter that he had taken from Colard on leaving the hotel, and it evidently did not occur to him what the consequence of that missive had been.

"Do you now confirm the contents of that document?" pursued M. de Badieres. But whether the effort had been too great for him, or he was too painfully agitated by the judge's disclosure, De Lozeril, instead of answering, closed his eyes and fell back in a dead faint.

Ever since all the skill of Maurice had been unavailing to arouse him. He remained in a state of absolute prostration and so dumb that Maurice concluded that the poniard must have penetrated to the throat, thus rendering speech impossible.

Several times M. de Badieres had returned to resume his examination, bnt always with the same result.

"Do you think," he at last said to Maurice, "that he will soon be strong enough to say 'yes' or 'no'?"

"Well, you see the state of lethargy in which he lies. It is a very bad sign, and I fear if he lives he will lose his mind."

"But just one word would be no great effort," persisted the judge.

"Yes, but even if he could say it, I doubt that he would understand the meaning."

"All I require is a simple 'yes' in confirmation of the contents of his letter. With this and with the information he gave me about what he himself had seen two years ago, I think I should be in a position to begin the trial."

"I will let you know the moment I see he can put two ideas together, but for the present you will get nothing out of him; his brain seems paralyzed."

"Then you think he does not know us?"

"I am sure he does not—so sure that I hardly know what answer to give to a certain great lady who is anxious to see him."

"Who is she?"

"The Marquise de Brageron."

"Yes, yes, I have heard of her. I believe she takes a great interest in the poor fellow," said M. de Badieres with a slight smile, which showed that he was not absolutely indifferent to the gossip of the town.

"She has written to me saying that she will come to-day, but I declare I don't know whether to admit her or not."

"Give her the satisfaction of letting her see him, at all events," advised the judge.

At that moment the knocker of the hall door resounding through the house, Maurice ran to the window, and, looking out, exclaimed:

"I thought so! It is she. Shall I really let her come up?"

"Certainly. She will at least be witness to the fact that M. de Lozeril is not in a state for my examination."

The judge had scarcely ceased speaking when Madame de Brageron entered.

"I trust, madame, that your presence may have some good effect on this poor fellow," said the judge, mournfully, pointing to De Lozeril, who, pale and exhausted, lay motionless on the bed; and with a courtly bow, which the lady returned with infinite grace, M. de Badieres left the room, followed by Maurice.

Left alone with the sufferer, Madame de Brageron advanced timidly to the bed and looked on the face of the dying man. She started back with surprise. With eyes wide open and a smile on his lips, De Lozeril raised himself on his pillows and said gayly, though with somewhat weak voice:

"Do you know, dear marquise, that I have waited long enough for your visit?"

"Was the doctor deceiving me then when he told me you were dying?" ashed the marquise, not yet recovered from her astonishment.

De Lozeril laughed merrily.

"Didn't you hear that gallant old judge say that he hoped your presence would work a miracle on my behalf? Well, the miracle has been worked."

"And you say you have been expecting me?"

"For ten long days," replied the chevalier.

"Then why did you not send for me?"

"Because I was an idiot, or rather because I was pretending to be an idiot. In asking for you they would have known I had recovered my senses, just the very thing they must not find out; so I had to wait patiently till you came."

"Why do you act this comedy?" asked the astonished lady.

"Ah, that is just what I don't like to tell you, unless you promise beforehand to forgive me."

"Tell me, all the same."

"When I said: 'Promise to *forgive me!*' I should rather have said: 'to be frank with me!'"

"Why, what do you mean?" cried the marquise.

"I mean what I say. You must answer me truthfully and without the slightest reticence."

"Very well, speak, then."

"Dear marquise, will you tell me if you love me really and truly?" And before Mme. de Brageron could reply De Lozeril went on: "By really and truly I mean, would my death make the whole world a desert to you, and would your grief and despair be such as to make you enter a convent?"

The marquise smiled.

"Very good," answered De Lozeril, "that smile convinces me beyond a doubt that you would never commit a folly for love of me, and after my death I should be very soon forgotten. Is it not so?"

"What are you driving at?" asked the lady, avoiding a direct reply.

"Well, just this. As your love for me is so very limited, I must beg you to forget me now while I am alive, rather than give yourself the trouble of waiting for my death."

The marquise drew herself up with an air of offended dignity.

De Lozeril, pretending not to observe her annoyance, continued:

"Oh, I have had plenty of time for reflection since I have been lying here, playing the idiot, and I have been asking myself whether it was from love that you kept me at your feet, or if you simply regarded me as a means of revenging yourself on others."

"Go on," said the marquise, dryly.

"The fact is proved by evidence, as the judge would say, who comes bothering me with his questions. Well, having admitted that you are not absolutely madly in love with me, may I ask if you would be very angry if I threw you over for more solid advantages?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Very well, dear marquise. These solid advantages I have already found, but I fear I have put them in jeopardy by committing an act of stupidity and writing an imprudent letter."

"The letter that is now in the hands of the justice?"

"Exactly."

"You know that it has led to the arrest of Madame Brichet and her father, I suppose."

"Alas! Yes."

"What! Do you pity the wretches who tried to murder you?" cried the marquise.

"Well, you know, dear marquise," said De Lozeril, with a shrug, "one ought to forgive one's dear friends a little spiteful action of this kind. The truth is, I want to retract that accusation."

"But that will be impossible. Your letter is too convincing."

"Impossible? Not at all, marquise, if you will only help me."

"How?"

"By causing the accusation to fall on some one else of whom you are not particularly fond," said De Lozeril, in a significant manner.

"The Baron de Cambiac!" cried the marquise, clasping her hands, a gleam of hatred in her terrible eyes.

We leave the two conspirators together, while for a moment we follow Maurice Gardi.

On conducting M. de Badieres to the door of the house, he met Colard coming up the steps.

Ever since the arrest of Madame Brichet and her father, Colard would come to the doctor's house at least ten times a day, begging for some news to communicate to Pauline.

Although the old man had but little affection for Aurore, he could not help pitying the unfortunate young woman who bore his master's beloved name, that name that had ever been honored and respected, but which was now, alas ! to be dragged through the mire of a great public scandal.

At every interview with the doctor Colard expressed an earnest hope that De Lozeril, on regaining his senses, would retract the statement he had made in that terrible letter which had caused the arrest of Aurore.

" Can the gentleman speak yet, doctor ?" he asked, as the judge went his way.

" Not yet, Colard. M. de Badieres has just been trying to get a few words from him in vain. Madame Brichet's fate really hangs on his 'yes' or 'no.'"

The steward made a gesture of despair.

" No, no," he said, " she cannot be guilty. My poor master must have been murdered by some of the Cartouche ruffians and not by her whom he had rendered both happy and rich."

" Rich ! Yes, rich !" cried Maurice. " And that is just what is said by the public. The *procureur* having made her rich, she wanted even more riches, and so instigated her father to murder him."

" But *this* murder could be of no use to her, for I am certain my master left his fortune to Pauline and not to her."

" Do you know the contents of the will, Colard ?"

"No, sir, but I know how he adored his daughter."

"Yes, but you see he adored his young wife, too, and a young wife might very easily make a doting old man forget his daughter. No one but Brichet's notary can really know how he left his money."

"That 's true, sir, and I tried to get him to tell me, but all he would say was : ' The day your master's death is certified we shall break the seals and read the will.' "

"It may, perhaps, be necessary during the trial to disclose the secret. Evidently it would go terribly against Madame Brichet if the bulk of the fortune has been left to her, for the judge would then see at once a motive for the crime."

Colard shook his head sadly.

"Oh," he said, "I hope I am not wicked, but I wish to heaven the young man had been killed by that blow ; then we should not now be hanging on his life and Madame Brichet would have had a chance of escaping the penalty of her crime."

"Her crime, do you say, Colard ? Do you suppose, then, it is possible she may be guilty !" cried Maurice, aghast.

"Oh, sir, what do I know ? How can I tell ? My poor old head is all in a muddle. I see the grief of my sweet Pauline !" replied the major-domo, with a despairing sigh.

His sigh was echoed by another from the doctor, who, since the occurrence of all these tragic events, had not once caught even the most transient glimpse of his idol.

"Adieu my friend," said Maurice, holding out his hand, "I must get back to my patient."

Colard took the proffered hand respectfully and went off, muttering to himself :

"If we only knew the contents of the will, we should then know what to think."

"Poor old fellow!" thought Maurice as he watched his retreating figure, "it 's a kind of monomania."

On returning to the sick man's bedside, he found him in exactly the same state of lethargy, his head thrown back on his pillows and the marquise sitting by his side, mournfully watching him.

"Well, madame, was I not right in wishing to spare you this painful emotion?" asked Maurice.

"Alas! doctor, you were indeed. My visit has been quite useless, for he has never given the slightest sign of recognition."

While the lady was speaking, Maurice was intently watching his patient.

"No, no, madame," he cried, raising his head, "your visit has not been useless and you have accomplished the miracle M. de Badieres hoped for! See! His face has lost its death-like pallor and his pulse is beating much more quickly. There is a great improvement. This state of inaction is about to cease and I can almost answer for his recovery."

"Heaven grant it!" said the hypocrite fervently, rising to go; for now that their plans were well arranged, she was all anxiety to put them in execution.

The doctor conducted her downstairs, and as the door closed behind them, De Lozeril sat up and laughed.

"Well! Well!" he cried gayly. "I think I see my way out of the scrape that stupid letter has got me into. I ought to have torn it up the moment Colard gave it back to me."

As the reader has doubtless divined, De Lozeril had regained perfect consciousness when M. De Badieres, at his first examination, had produced the fatal letter, but wishing to gain time for reflection, he had deemed

it expedient to pretend unconsciousness in order to avoid answering any compromising questions. He thus had had ample leisure to think quietly over his present situation and to devise a scheme for the future.

In order to learn all that had passed since the moment he fell senseless in the square, he had only to lie still and listen to the conversation of M. De Badieres and the doctor.

He had heard of the arrival of the patrol and the subsequent search in his pockets.

"Good!" he said to himself. "It was that cursed captain who tried to murder me to obtain the letter and rob me of the rest of my money, and he was only prevented by the guard coming up. Ah, so, Master Annibal! That is the way you hold to your bargains, is it? Well, you shall be hanged for it, my fine friend, and I shall accuse you of murdering Brichet before trying to make away with me."

But although the idea of revenge was sweet to him, still further reflection told him that the hanging of the captain would be a serious obstacle to his success with Pauline, Fouquier being his only means of gaining a footing in the Hotel Brichet.

"Decidedly I have been a fool," he thought. "I had both the captain and his daughter in my power, but now I have shown my hand and the game is up. My only chance was that they would follow my lead and play into my hands, but that is all over now, for the mansion will be closed to me, and farewell to my marriage with Pauline. What an ass that Annibal has been! Only for his stupid idea of murdering me, all would have gone well. But, no! Let me be just—it is I who has been the worst ass, for except for that compromising letter of mine they would never have arrested Fouquier."

Always brooding over the affair, De Lozeril at length said to himself :

" After all, my position is really not so bad. Pauline will certainly be grateful to me for denouncing her father's assassins ; the house will reopen its doors to me ; I shall play my part well, and the young lady will finish by rewarding my devotion with her hand." And he added, laughing, " I shall have all to myself the fortune I was only to share with Annibal."

The bright future that he painted for himself in such glowing colors was only obscured by one small cloud, his fear of Madame de Brageron.

" Who knows," he said, " if, while I am playing the turtle-dove to Pauline, she may not rush in and upset the whole affair ! When the bewitching marquise finds herself abandoned she is not the most accommodating of women, and her rage is not desirable. Witness the Baron de Cambiac."

This name inspired him with a new idea.

" The very thing," he thought. " If I can only involve him somehow in this attempt on my life, she will forget my small misdemeanors in the desire to gratify her vengeance on him. But how can I propose this scheme to her ? If I ask to see her, I must first wake from my state of prostration, and then the wearisome old judge will instantly appear and begin boring me with his questions, before I get an opportunity of consulting with her. I must wait till she comes of her own accord."

It was not until a week following this soliloquy that the marquise appeared, and then, owing to the temporary absence of Maurice, they were able to come to an understanding.

When the doctor, after conducting Madame de Brageron to the door, returned to his patient, he found

him with his eyes open, seemingly regaining consciousness.

"Where am I?" he murmured faintly.

"He is saved!" thought the good doctor, joyfully.

And in fact, the young man from that moment made such rapid strides toward convalescence that two days afterward M. de Badieres again presented himself at his bedside and demanded an answer to the important question:

"Do you acknowledge this letter?"

"Yes, I do," replied De Lozeril.

"Now, take care how you answer my next question," said the judge, very gravely, "for, on your reply, the fate of the accused almost depends. "Do you persist in your declaration?"

"I do persist!" said De Lozeril, emphatically.

CHAPTER XII.

The day of the trial at length arrived. From early morning an eager crowd besieged every entrance to the Chatelet, and had the Hall of Justice been twice as large it would yet have been far too small to accommodate the excited multitude which surged around the doors.

Public curiosity had been on the alert for a whole month, it having been determined to await the convalescence of the chief witness before beginning the trial.

The reserved inclosure was invaded by an aristocratic crowd, in which were many gentlemen, attracted thither by the reports of Madame Brichet's beauty.

As for the ladies, it interested them to see, in the prisoner's dock, a handsome young woman, who, at the time of her marriage, eclipsed them all with the brilliancy of her fetes and the elegance of her toilets.

In the front row sat the Marquise de Brageron, gay and smiling, returning with a graceful bow the recognitions of her numerous friends. On looking around the hall she suddenly espied De Cambiac, standing, pale and anxious, in one of the window recesses.

"Ah, so your love for Aurore follows her even to the prisoner's dock! Before very long I hope you may be seated there beside her," she said to herself with con-

centrated fury, though to all appearance smiling and serene as before.

By a change in the judicial arrangements, M. de Badieres, instead of conducting the prosecution, was seated on the bench. After the preliminary formalities he ordered the prisoners to be brought in.

Aurore entered in the midst of a profound silence, which was broken by a murmur of admiration as she advanced.

She looked supremely beautiful. Her dark wavy hair forming a vivid contrast to the lovely pallor that overspread her perfect features, while her great lustrous eyes shone out with all the brilliancy of fever.

Leaning on her father's arm, her faultless form showed to the greatest advantage beside the colossal figure of the rough old soldier. She advanced with quiet grace and dignity, but, suddenly perceiving the concentrated stare of the spectators, she wavered for a moment. Her father, stooping, said, in a voice of wonderful softness :

" Come, my child, courage !"

His love for his daughter being his one vulnerable point, Annibal, in this terrible crisis, became once more an anxious father.

Enforced abstinence from drinking during his imprisonment had somewhat improved the captain's outer man, modifying the usual purple tint of his features, though their expression was as bold and sinister as before, and the look he cast around him as he entered was like that of some caged animal.

Still there was a certain beauty in the man, though of a ferocious type.

The seclusion of the last month had been a terrible strain on his powerful organization, and fearing that he might be tempted to give vent to his over-wrought

feelings by some deed of violence, eight stalwart soldiers had been detailed to keep a strict watch on the giant, day and night.

As soon as the prisoners were seated, M. de Badieres rose, and in a slow and impressive voice declared:

"Annibal Fouquier, you are accused of an attempt to murder the Chevalier de Lozeril, and also of the assassination of Louis Victor Brichet, Procureur of the Chatelet.

"You, Aurore Brichet, are accused of complicity in the said crimes, and with having aided and abetted your father in their accomplishment."

Before the soldiers could restrain him, Annibal rose and drawing himself up to his gigantic height roared out:

"A lie, so far as I am concerned, and an infernal lie as regards my daughter."

"Make the prisoner sit down," ordered the judge.

On hearing the accusation of having murdered her husband, Mme. Brichet suddenly raised her head and looked around in terrified amazement. Her eyes encountered those of De Cambiac fixed on her with a look of the most passionate devotion.

"*He* is here," she murmured, all her fears vanishing and her whole being suffused with a nameless joy.

"Aurore Brichet, what have you to answer?" demanded the judge.

She rose, and extending her hand, said in a clear voice:

"I swear before God and man that I am innocent of these crimes."

"And you, prisoner Fouquier?"

"Bah! What should I say?"

"Bring in the witness Colard."

In this complicated trial there were but few wit-

nesses, and these few had only the most vague information to offer ; but the prosecution hoped that some trivial observation on their part might possibly give a clue to the mystery.

Colard's deposition would naturally have been of slight importance had not the good man, in his embarrassment at finding himself the cynosure of all eyes, let fall a phrase which was eagerly seized on by the prosecution and turned to account, as we shall see.

Questioning him on the subject of his master's disappearance, the judge asked :

"Your belief is that Brichet left his house of his own accord? You do not think he could have been surprised and carried off during the night?"

"No. M. Brichet went away of his own free will, taking with him only a little valise, the contents of which I missed from the wardrobe. Having been in his service over twenty years, I knew every single thing he possessed. Besides, my master had told his friends he was going away, and he left a letter addressed to his wife and daughter, so I am quite certain he went of his own accord."

"And you have never been able to guess the motive of his departure?"

"Never."

"Just previous to his going away did you notice any change in his habits?"

"In his *habits?* No, sir ; but in his disposition, yes. M. Brichet, who was naturally gay and friendly, became gloomy and suspicious. Having just been married, I thought for a moment he might be jealous and—"

At these words he was suddenly interrupted by the judge :

"Jealous," said he; "had he any cause for jealousy?"

"Oh, your worship, I said that without thinking. I did indeed," said Colard, frightened by the judge's serious tone.

"Did you observe anything in Madame Brichet's conduct to cause her husband uneasiness?"

Colard fairly broke down.

"Oh, it is too bad to take up a poor man's words in that way and to make him say things he never meant! My God! One would think I intended to accuse madame! Oh, I am not used to a court of justice. I don't know what I am saying. You ought not to twist my words so."

Madame de Brageron, who had followed Colard's deposition attentively, now said to herself, with a faint smile:

"Good! This whimpering old man has doubtless put the cord 'round my lady's neck!"

M. de Badieres might possibly have allowed Colard's remark to pass without much notice had he not observed that on hearing the word 'jealous' Madame Brichet had trembled slightly.

"Can that be the key to the mystery?" he thought.

By degrees Colard regained his composure, and his examination was resumed. Not to alarm the poor old man, M. de Badieres passed to the second part of the indictment—the attempted assassination of the Chevalier de Lozeril.

The old valet deposed that the chevalier had been gambling all the evening with the captain, and spoke of the letter with which De Lozeril had charged him.

"Do you know the contents of that letter?" asked the judge.

"M. de Lozeril told me that it was to let a friend know he would not return that evening."

"And when you found him locked up in the room,

did he seem frightened, as if the captain had been threatening him ?"

"No, your worship. He was quite gay and not the the least uneasy. He said he was waiting till the captain came back with some more money, which he had gone to borrow from Madame Brichet."

"And did he get any !"

"Yes, I think so, but it must have been very little."

"Why do you think so ?"

"Because, your worship, I knew that madame was wanting money herself. Several times during that day she had asked for me, and at the very moment M. de Lozeril was announced she was about to speak to me, but seemed to forget what she was going to say, and it was not till quite late in the evening that she made her request."

"What request ?"

"To get for her four thousand crowns, of which she was in pressing need."

At this answer Mme. Brichet trembled visibly, a sign of emotion not lost upon the judge, who observed at the same time a look of intense surprise on the face of Annibal.

And, indeed, the captain was thinking to himself :

"What the mischief could Aurore want with all that money ?"

Inspired by his double observation, the judge continued his examination, and, seeming to abandon the pursuit of that question, so as not to alarm old Colard, went on :

"You were completely in the confidence of your master ?"

"Yes, sir, and his daughter and his wife honored me with theirs also. It was I who settled all the house accounts and no money was spent without passing

through my hands," said the major-domo, looking very important.

"Were the accounts very large?"

"Oh, no, your worship. The two ladies were very economical, and during the last two years I put by a great deal of money. Miss Pauline spent the most, on account of her poor people; but Madame Brichet, living in the strictest seclusion, spent next to nothing."

"Then, prisoner Aurore, what were you going to do with the four thousand crowns which you demanded all at once from your steward?" asked the judge, abruptly turning to Madame Brichet.

This question, falling on her like a thunderbolt, Aurore was visibly agitated, and stammered forth:

"This matter has nothing to do with the case."

"In the midst of your frugal life, it appears very strange that you should suddenly be in want of so large a sum, and the court requires you to explain the circumstance," persisted the judge.

Madame Brichet was silent.

"Reflect that if you refuse to throw any light on it, we must surmise that the money was required to pay the assassin who an hour later attempted the life of De Lozeril."

Pale as death, De Cambiac listened to this terrible suspicion. With haggard eyes and clenched hands, he trembled under the torture that racked him.

"Do you refuse to answer?"

But Aurore was mute.

"Good God! If these four thousand crowns, of which I know nothing, are to drag the girl deeper into the mire!" said the captain to himself. Then suddenly starting up and addressing the court, he declared, in his stentorian voice: "The money was intended for me. My daughter does not like to admit that I am

a desperate gambler, but it is too well known a fact that she should hesitate to avow it, and the regard for my reputation is unnecessary."

Aurore thanked her father with her eyes.

"Yes, yes, you may thank me, little fool; but I should like to know, all the same, what you wanted that money for!" said Annibal to himself.

The audience had for a moment imagined that a clue had been discovered, but the captain's words dissipated the expectation, and Colard was again overcome by despair on seeing that he had once more compromised Madame Brichet.

"My God! My God!" he cried, in deep distress. "Is it possible that they can attach a terrible meaning to every word I say?"

But the revelation of Annibal having in some degree reassured the poor old man, M. De Badieres continued his examination:

"When did you learn that M. De Lozeril had been attacked a few paces from the hotel?"

"The next morning; I heard it from the neighbors; they got the news from Doctor Gardi, who had picked up the wounded man along the patrol. I was shocked at such a horrible fate having overtaken the poor gentleman who left our house so well a few minutes before."

"What o'clock was it?"

"Nearly midnight. At my age I cannot sit up late, and I was so tired that I hastened to bar the door and get off to my bed as quickly as I could without troubling myself about the captain, whom I left at the foot of the stairs."

"Now for it," thought the captain, "here comes my turn."

And he was not deceived, for the judge proceeded:

"Ah, you left the captain at the foot of the stairs, and do you think that he then reopened the door and went in pursuit of the chevalier?"

"No, your worship. I am quite sure that at first he went to his own room just under mine, for I had scarcely got into my bed, when I heard a tremendous row below and cries and oaths, so I knew he was in his room."

This storm of curses had been caused by Annibal's discovery of the theft, when the panel had been opened by a mysterious hand and the money abstracted. He had run hither and thither searching in every corner for his missing treasure, and it was this commotion and the carrying about of lights that had attracted the attention of Maurice just before his hearing that terrible cry of agony.

"Yes, I see what you are coming to, meddling old fool!" thought Annibal, rightly guessing what the judge's next question would be.

"Annibal Fouquier, what caused you to make the disturbance described by Colard?"

A prudent instinct closed his lips on the subject of the bank-notes until De Lozeril should have given his evidence, and the captain answered quietly:

"I was furious with the fool of a servant who had made my bed with the feet higher than the head."

The judge appeared to accept this statement and, turning to Colard, asked:

"A little while ago, in speaking of the captain, you said: 'I am certain that at first he went to his room,' what did you mean by that? Do you think that after his rage was over the accused then went out?"

"Mathurin, the cook, who went to bed a little later than I, told me that on going to his room he met the captain rushing downstairs like a whirlwind, and that

he ran out to the garden in the direction of the pavilion."

"Hum, hum! This is getting mixed," muttered the captain, on hearing these words.

"What were you going to do there after midnight?" asked the judge, turning toward Fouquier.

"Well, with a bed so badly made I knew I should not close my eyes, and I preferred the idea of a night at a gambling-house, so I went to see if my daughter had the money I wanted to play with from Colard."

"The four thousand crowns?"

"Precisely. Isn't it so, Aurore?" said the captain to his daughter, hoping she would follow his lead, and, after a slight hesitation, she bowed affirmatively.

"They are lying, both of them," thought the judge.

"Instead of going to the pavilion, did you not rather cross the garden and go out at the little door and thus intercept De Lozeril, who would have gone round by the Quai!"

"What for?" asked the audacious Annibal.

"That you might kill and rob him of those bank-notes you knew he had with him," answered the judge, pointing to the bundle of perforated notes lying on the table before the judges.

"Bah! I see what you are driving at," said Fouquier with a shrug. "If I had wanted to murder De Lozeril for his money I had every facility for doing so an hour before, instead of waiting until he got into the public street, for I had held him on the point of my sword and could have run him through the body at any moment. There was nothing to prevent my finishing him off."

"What! *Nothing?*" asked the judge, significantly.

"No, nothing."

"You forget that at that moment M. de Lozeril had

not on his person that letter which you had the strongest motive for obtaining, as it denounced to justice the authors of a hitherto undiscovered crime."

"Oh, come now, don't let 's have any more of that stuff about Brichet's death ! I 've had enough of it for a whole month," said the captain, with a mocking laugh.

"Bring in the second witness," ordered the judge, and the notary, who had Brichet's will, entered.

"You know the particulars of the *procureur's* fortune ?" asked M. de Badieres.

"Yes, your worship. Ever since M. Brichet's disappearance I have administered his property, awaiting either his return or the confirmation of his death, which would have put in possession the persons designated in his will."

"What is the amount of the fortune ?"

"Seven millions."

The notary's words sent a thrill through the vast audience. So enormous a sum might well have tempted an assassin's cupidity.

"Have you brought the will ?" asked the magistrate.

"Here it is," said the lawyer, producing it.

"Do you know its contents ?"

"I do, your worship, but professional etiquette forbids me to make any disclosures until the seals can be legally broken."

"Justice demands to see this document, on the principle laid down in the maxim 'Find out whom the crime would profit,' and the court insists on the will being read."

At these words the notary handed the will to the registrar, who, having broken the seals, read it in a loud voice.

After leaving one million to Pauline, and a pension

for life to Colard, the bulk of the fortune was left to Aurore.

"But that is impossible!" cried the notary in consternation. He had listened to the registrar in absolute stupefaction, and his exclamation was now so evidently caused by utter astonishment that the audience was impressed as vividly as though it had been a studied scenic effect.

A thrill of surprise ran through the listening crowd, and the judge continued eagerly:

"Can this document be the work of a forger?"

"Oh, no, sir. This was very certainly written by Brichet in my presence," replied the witness, regaining his composure.

"Then why were you so overcome?"

"Because, your worship, I firmly believed this paper to have been destroyed and replaced by another which I was absolutely certain had been placed in that envelope."

"Explain yourself."

"The day before his disappearance Brichet came to my office for the purpose of changing entirely the will he had a short time before placed in my hands. This will was the one which has just been read before the court. Having several clients to attend to that morning, I left the *procureur* in my private room seated before my desk, preparing to make a new will. When I returned he had finished his task, the new testament having taken the place of the discarded one in the large envelope, which had just been resealed. Brichet was then standing in front of the chimney-piece, and pointing to some paper burning on the hearth, he said to me: 'Foolish is the old man who falls in love at an age when he should content himself with being a father. He is rewarded only by ridicule and ingrati-

tude.' Brichet, in speaking thus, appeared to be influenced by a sullen anger. I avoided asking him the cause, as I imagined he would not care to tell me, but I concluded he had now been reconstructing for his daughter's benefit the will he had so lately made in favor of his young wife."

"Then, it would appear from what you say that latterly Brichet was dissatisfied with the conduct of his wife?"

"Indeed I cannot tell. I merely expressed my private opinion," replied the notary, evidently afraid to commit himself to an assertion.

Until now Mme. Brichet had always enjoyed a reputation for goodness and truth, and now for the second time the proceedings had awakened a strong suspicion that all had not gone smoothly during Brichet's second short experience of matrimony.

During the notary's deposition all eyes were turned eagerly on Aurore, but those who hoped to read in her countenance any indications of her guilt or innocence were disappointed; for her lovely face was buried in her hands, all that remained visible being her bewitching little ears and these, it was remarked, became crimson, but whether from indignation or shame, it was impossible to conjecture.

"How can you account for the existence of this will which you believed to have been destroyed?" asked De Badieres.

"I suppose that Brichet in his agitation must have, by mistake, thrown into the fire the second will he made and replaced this one in the envelope."

The magistrate made a sign to the notary to sit down.

During his examination no one in that vast audience had been half so painfully affected as the good Colard, who was seated by the side of Doctor Gardi.

Maurice had come to the trial lest his services should be required by M. de Lozeril, who had been carried to the chatelet and now lay on an improvised bed in one of the adjoining rooms, waiting until his evidence should be summoned.

Colard was deeply distressed at the contents of the will, and could not repress a groan.

"Ah! M. Maurice," he said, "who would have thought that my master wonld thus have despoiled his own child for the benefit of his second wife."

"But you see he regretted having done so, as he made a second will."

"Yes, but it has been burned, and now everything will go to Madame Brichet," sobbed the old man in despair at seeing Pauline's inheritance thus disposed of.

"Well, let us see how the trial ends," said Maurice, trying to console him.

"How it ends, you say? But how, then, could it end?"

"If Madame Brichet is convicted of having killed her husband for the sake of his money, it is quite evident that his property would revert to Miss Pauline," replied Maurice.

"Oh, the poor, dear lady! I could never believe her capable of such a crime. Heaven grant she may be acquitted!"

"I trust so, indeed, Colard," said Maurice, heartily.

Colard seemed to hesitate before putting his next question.

"But," said he, "supposing madame is found innocent, can she still inherit?"

"Why, certainly; for despite the error deposed to by the notary, the will is perfectly legal, and in default of a later one, holds good."

"Then it is to be hoped madame will be condemned,"

murmured Colard to himself, his devotion to Pauline having rendered him ferocious.

After the notary's evidence the court adjourned for a few minutes.

During the past hour Madame De Brageron had watched the Baron De Cambiac most intently, enjoying to the full the mental agony of the young man. His whole attitude bespoke such an amount of tender and absorbing love and the look he bent on Aurore was so full of unwavering confidence in her innocence that the marquise, beside herself with rage and jealousy, could not but exclaim: "How he loves her!" And she consoled herself with the hope of a speedy revenge.

The voice of the usher calling for silence now resounded through the hall, and the examination was resumed.

"Bring in M. De Lozeril!" ordered the judge.

At the name of this witness, a thrill of excitement ran through the vast concourse, and every eye was turned toward the door which opened to admit the chevalier, who, leaning on Maurice, advanced, pale and with a faltering gait, toward the chair which had been prepared for him.

At the request of the court, the chevalier, amidst the most profound silence, gave a detailed account of his first nocturnal adventure in the square, and described his meeting with the man and the sack.

"You have admitted in your letter that this murdered man resembled to the life the portrait which was shown you, although at first you denied the likeness?" asked the judge.

"That is true."

"You declared later that your denial was owing to the fact that you feared to accuse innocent persons.

Now tell us how it was you afterward changed your mind."

"Blackguard!" thought Annibal, who listened with the gravest attention.

"On reflection, I came to the conclusion that the crime must have been committed by those whom it would more benefit, and when the captain took me up to his room, he asked me a thousand questions on the subject, coming back to it again and again, so that at last my suspicions were aroused. We did nothing the whole evening but talk about the murder."

"The lying dog! What is he coming to now!" thought Annibal, on the rack.

"But," said the judge, "Colard deposed that you had passed the evening in play."

"Oh, yes; I told him that when he came up to the captain's room, where I was locked in."

"And it was then that you wrote the letter which you gave Colard. You must have been under grave apprehension for your safety when you wrote such a document."

"The captain's cross-questioning had put me on my guard. I knew him to be a violent man. And his having locked me in excited my suspicions; so I wrote that letter and gave it to Colard."

"What excuse did Fouquier make for leaving the room?"

"Just what I told Colard, that he was going to ask his daughter for money to go on playing with."

"Then it was as Colard said, and you had been playing?"

"Yes, but very little, for the captain does not know how to play and, on a contested point, rushed to his sword."

"Well, well," said the astonished Annibal to himself,

"the chevalier is a pretty good hand at making up stories."

"Then you fought there in the room without seconds?"

"Yes, and while defending myself, I could not help thinking that the captain was taking this means to get rid of me, to prevent my making any revelations about the murder of Brichet. After this I felt certain that he must be guilty."

De Lozeril here paused a moment to take breath, and then added:

"I admit now that I was mistaken."

A movement of surprise showed itself among the audience, and the chevalier continued:

"'I saw afterward that the captain might easily have killed me, for he held me exhausted at the point of his sword, but he generously made me the present of my life—without any condition."

And De Lozeril emphasized these last three words, looking steadily at the captain.

"Yes, yes!" said Annibal to himself. "I see your game, you scoundrel. You slip over our little arrangement of so much a minute and our bargain about Pauline. But what are you driving at now?" and after this reflection the captain looked toward the judge for permission to speak.

On receiving an affirmative sign, he remarked:

"The witness has just said that I might have killed him, but granted him his life. Was it then likely that twenty minutes later I should try to murder him at the corner of the street?"

"It is perfectly logical," replied the judge, "because it would have been extremely difficult for you to remove a dead body from the house, while a corpse left in the open square would give you no trouble what-

ever. After killing him in your own room it would have been very dangerous to rob him, but in the street there was comparatively little risk."

"Stuff and nonsense!" thought the captain. "Where does he get hold of such ideas?"

Pointing to the bank-notes on the table, the judge continued, to the chevalier:

"These notes are yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why are they perforated?"

And the chevalier explained the reason.

"Besides desiring your death for the purpose of concealing Brichet's murder, you said that the second motive of the captain was his desire to rob you?"

De Lozeril paused, and then replied, slowly and with emphasis:

"I believed it *then*."

"What do you mean by *then*, are you not as sure now?"

The chevalier stopped again.

"Come, speak."

"On reflecting, I came to the conclusion that another person had an interest in wishing for my death. I was engaged to fight a duel, which had been postponed for some hours to give my adversary the opportunity of paying me some money he owed me. Involuntarily it occurred to me that he might have taken this means of getting out of both the duel and the debt."

"Who was this gentleman?"

"The Baron de Cambiac."

Before the baron could recover from his surprise at hearing his name thus put in evidence, and before any one could step forward to oppose him, De Ravennes

had rushed to the front and cried in a voice trembling with indignation :

" You lie, sir ! As the Baron de Cambiac's second, and knowing nothing of what had befallen you, I went to your house on the following day, taking with me a sealed packet inclosing his debt and a word from your adversary telling you he was at your disposal. Your wound and your subsequent illness have hitherto prevented my renewing on his part M. de Cambiac's challenge, but now, in the face of your infamous insinuation, I throw aside all reserve and fling the lie back in your teeth !"

So saying, De Ravennes drew from his pocket a bulky letter, and dashing it on the table, folded his arms, saying with superb disdain :

" There, sir ! Read that and count your money !"

The court and all those seated near the table broke out in one great cry of surprise, for the notes that fell from the packet were every one pierced through in precisely the same manner as those already lying on the table.

CHAPTER XIII.

The whole audience rose *en masse*, gasping with excitement and curiosity to discover the motive for this sudden agitation. But however startling the incident may have been to the rest, nothing could exceed the blank amazement that overcame the Chevalier and Annibal at the sight of the well-known bundle of notes. At the first glance the captain recognized his lost treasure.

"Thunder!" he said to himself, "there are my notes sure enough, but how the mischief did they get into De Cambiac's hands. De Lozeril, in his depositon, never said one word about the money. Could this have been the cause of his silence? Can he be the inventor of this juggling trick?"

But the captain was wrong in supposing that De Lozeril knew anything about it, for, indeed, he had seen the apparition of these notes with positive stupefaction. During his deposition, when he tried to throw a suspicion on De Cambiac's integrity, he knew full well he was committing an infamy; but now, this bundle of notes, coming in evidence in this mysterious manner, seemed to lend weight to his false assertion and to give it all the semblance of truth.

"These are certainly the notes I gave to Fouquier," he thought, "but how can De Cambiac have got them?"

And looking toward Annibal for an explanation, he found that the captain's eye was fixed on him with an expression of utter amazement, seeing which a rapid wink was exchanged by the two rogues.

"What does it all mean?" said the chevalier's wink to the captain.

"Blessed if I know," returned the versatile Annibal's.

But the aspect of Mme. Brichet soon revealed the secret.

Aurore, who until now had sat head down, her face hidden in her hands, suddenly raised herself, her features convulsed with agitation, and her eyes seeking De Cambiac, she tried in vain to overcome her nervous agitation and speak.

"It is Madame Brichet who has given the money to De Cambiac, and now she trembles for him," thought De Lozeril, on seeing the young woman's painful emotion.

"I understand now," said Annibal to himself. "The chevalier guessed rightly about the baron and Aurore. The little wretch has robbed me for her Gascon," and the prudent captain, who had never for a moment lost his *sang-froid*, laid his hand quickly on Aurore's arm, who, thus recalled to her senses, resumed her seat without having spoken.

"The child would have betrayed herself," he thought. "Better let events take their course; but how the devil did she get hold of that money! Can there be another door unknown to me in that room?"

Without seeking to explain to herself the mystery of the bank-notes, the Marquise de Brageron had grasped only the one all-important fact, namely, that De Cambiac was lost.

"At last!" murmured the vindictive woman.

Aurore's agitation had escaped the watchful eye of M. de Badieres, from the fact that he and his *confrères* were busily comparing the notes already on the table with the bundle thrown down by De Ravennes.

Under the vile aspersion of De Lozeril, the Baron de Cambiac had drawn himself up, quivering with indignation, but before he could pronounce a single word, De Ravennes had generously thrown himself into the breach. De Cambiac was so far away from the center of the movement that he had been quite unable to divine its cause, and surprised at seeing all eyes turned on himself with so strange an expression, he felt at once a vague presentiment of evil.

"Baron de Cambiac, advance!" cried the stern voice of the president, and the young man, nerving himself with an effort, walked calmly toward the judge. When he found himself near the table, a glance at the notes at once explained the mystery, and he could not repress a slight start, which was not lost on M. Badieres. "The letter that Monsieur de Ravannes has just shown us was written by you?"

"It was, your worship."

"While it refers to a duel that was to have taken place between you and M. de Lozeril, it also speaks of a debt and mentioned the amount which you had enclosed in this same letter. This sum was represented by the packet of bank-notes found in the envelope. Do you recognize it?"

"Yes, your worship," repeated the baron.

The judge now turned toward the chevalier.

"M. de Lozeril," said he, "when you were attacked in the square how many bundles of notes had you on your person?"

The chevalier hesitated a moment before the infamous falsehood he was about to tell, but a little dry

cough sounding through the silence of the chamber smote upon his ear, and knowing that this was a command from the marquise that he dared not disobey, he boldly answered :

" Four, your worship."

At this announcement, Annibal murmured gayly :

" Oh, oh, he seems to have forgotten all about the bundle he gave me. Why does he want to ruin the baron, I wonder ? Well, well, every man for himself, and so long as I get out of the scrape it 's all the same to me."

" Let the officer of the patrol who picked up the wounded man appear," ordered M. de Badieres.

The sergeant came forth from a group of witnesses.

" In your report you mention only three packets of notes found on the wounded man."

" I can swear there were only three."

" Do you recognize this packet ?"

" Oh, yes ! I know it by the hole running through— I thought it was intended for a string to make a garland."

" Good, you may sit down," ordered the judge, and, turning to De Lozeril, he added :

" Be good enough to explain again to the court your reason for thus piercing these notes," and the chevalier complied.

When he had finished speaking, the judge, turning to M. de Cambiac, who had remained apparently indifferent, said :

" M. de Cambiac, will you tell us how these notes which you gave in payment of your debt to De Lozeril came into your possession ?"

But the baron remained silent.

" Take care ! Your silence is compromising. M. de Lozeril swears that he had on his person four of those

packets and the sergeant's report says that only three were found on him when wounded. What became of the fourth? This bundle which you have acknowledged is likewise perforated. We are far from concluding that you are guilty, but in refusing to say from whom you received this money you cut short the thread of evidence, which, if we followed it up, might possibly bring us to the culprit, that is to the person who, having wounded the chevalier, had evidently only time to partially rob him."

"Ah! I suppose you mean that for me, you wretched old owl!" thought Annibal, on seeing M. De Badieres insensibly turn his eyes toward him. The baron still maintained silence.

"For the last time, sir, let me advise you to answer," persisted the judge. But in vain. De Cambiac was immovable. "What is it? What do you want?" asked M. De Badieres of the sergeant of the watch, who now signified his desire to speak.

"If you please, your worship, I forgot something in my deposition—something that I thought of so little importance that I did not enter it in my report, but I see now that I ought to have done so. It is this: That a few moments before finding the chevalier in the square, we had met M. De Cambiac."

"You are quite sure?" asked the judge.

"Perfectly certain, your worship," replied the sergeant, suddenly fixing his eyes on the baron's feet.

"What are you looking at?"

"My word, but here is something queer! Not far from the square and close to the garden of the house I picked up the half of a broken silver spur exactly like those M. De Cambiac now has on his boots," and stooping down the better to examine the spurred heels of the baron, the soldier cried eagerly: "Why, look

at this spur! It is fresher than the other! It must have taken the place of the one I found, and they can be easily compared, for I gave it to the barkeeper of the Broc d' Or in exchange for a bottle of wine."

The profound sensation made by this statement may be easily imagined.

"Everything goes against him," thought De Lozeril, seeing how fate was playing into his hands.

"M. De Cambiac," said the judge, turning to the baron, who still remained impassive as before, "you have refused to give us any information about the bank-notes, do you intend further to refuse to state whence you were coming, at midnight, when you were met so near the scene of this crime?"

Deadly pale but perfectly calm, De Cambiac at this appeal stepped forward, and extending his hand above Aurore's head declared, in an impressive voice:

"This lady is innocent. I confess that it was I who attempted to assassinate the Chevalier de Lozeril!"

On hearing these words, Madame Brichet suddenly stood up, uttered a piercing shriek and fell senseless to the ground. The public imagined that Aurore had been utterly overcome on thus finding her innocence proved, but there was one person who took a different view of the affair. Maurice Gardi could not banish from his mind the recollection of that mysterious exit from the window of the pavilion and the later episode of the broken spur.

"He is no more guilty than she is," he thought. "But he is assuming the crime to save the honor and the life of the woman he loves."

At his side still remained Colard, who remarked:

"There is madame half out of her troubles, at all events. Now there only remains the death of Monsieur Brichet to be cleared up."

"Let us hope that she will get over that also, Colard," said Maurice, full of confidence in the baron's devotion. "Yes, my good friend, you will soon see your mistress return to her home happy and respected."

"And rich? Is it not so? For the will must then hold good," added the old servant, becoming grave once more.

"Oh, yes, certainly, her innocence proved and Monsieur Brichet's death certified, she would of course inherit at once."

Two minutes later, when Maurice turned to address an observation to Colard, he was no longer there, and Maurice could not repress a smile, saying to himself:

"Poor old fellow, he has gone off to cry somewhere over Pauline's sad fate. His devotion to her would actually make him desire Madame Brichet's conviction."

After his confession and before the judge had time to order his arrest, De Cambiac had voluntarily placed himself in the prisoner's dock between Aurore and her father.

In order to give De Lozeril a few minutes' necessary repose, the court had adjourned for a quarter of an hour. During this short interval, a great change had taken place in the public mind with regard to Madame Brichet who, having been cleared of one crime, was now unanimously voted innocent of the other. When De Cambiac had taken his place by Annibal's side, the latter was in deep reflection.

"That blackguard, De Lozeril," he thought, "the brute, as soon as the trial is over he will pocket all these bundles of notes and say nothing about the one that is honestly mine," and he kept his eyes fixed on his own particular parcel with an expression of affectionate regret.

But the approach of the baron, recalling him to the

present situation, he said, turning to the young man with a smile:

"Ah, baron! How are you? It is quite an age since we have met."

"I do not know you," replied De Cambiac, with a gesture of unutterable disgust.

"Oh, indeed," thought the philosophic Annibal, "this young man chooses now to despise me. I, who was to have been his father-in-law! Alas, for poor human nature! De Cambiac won't know me, Aurore compromises me, and De Lozeril robs me. Dear, dear! Well, I understand now why people become monks!" And overcome by so many disillusions, the captain went calmly to sleep.

To the baron's left, Aurore, recovering from her faint, but exhausted by the conflict of emotions raging within her, continued to sob convulsively, utterly unable to control herself.

"Aurore, dear Aurore! See. Now we are once more together," murmured the young man in a voice overflowing with tenderness, but Aurore could only answer faintly:

"Ah, Raoul, you have ruined yourself for me!" and her sobs redoubled.

"God will save us both, or we shall die together, my darling."

"No no, I cannot accept such a sacrifice. I must and will speak."

"No, my Aurore, you will remain silent, for your words, while they would save me, would be the death of your father, for every one believes him guilty. Besides, my beloved, you could not own to the truth!"

Like De Cambiac, Aurore, too, trembled for the fate of the captain, and she could only reply with a despairing groan.

Under the care of Maurice, M. de Lozeril had regained sufficient strength to support the fatigue of a further attendance, so the proceedings were now again resumed. The trial had assumed a different aspect. The baron's confession had obviated the necessity of prosecuting the first charge of the indictment. The inquiry now concerned the death of Brichet; and M. de Lozeril repeated once more the story of his first adventure in the square, ending with the episode of the miniature. It was thought advisable to make a searching cross-examination of each servant in the house to elicit every particular concerning the days preceding Brichet's disappearance. M. de Badieres was about to begin his interrogatory, when he was suddenly and noisily interrupted by the captain, who at that moment awakened from his balmy slumbers. Having been apparently inspired thereby, he now arose and cried in his tremendous voice:

"What the mischief is the good of beginning all that questioning over again, when the whole affair might be settled in ten words?"

The light guards prepared once more to hang on to the colossal "obstructionist," but M. de Badieres, fearing some deed of violence should the giant be too forcibly coerced, ordered them to desist and gave him permission to speak.

"Faith, that 's the first sensible word I 've heard today," remarked the irrepressible, "and since it now seems possible, let us talk a little about this affair," and with the most cynical coolness, Annibal, looking around the hall of justice, continued in a sarcastic tone:

"So long as it was a question of that knife that some amiable person stuck into the chevalier's back, I held my tongue and allowed you to persist in your mono-

mania that it was I who had played the little game; and now that my daughter and I have been proved perfectly innocent of that nocturnal frolic, here you are beginning to bother again with that old joke about Brichet's death. Now, *I* want to ask *you* a question. How do you know he is dead?"

"The deposition of M. de Lozeril states it beyond a doubt."

"Very well, just so. Supposing my son-in-law has been killed. Why should it follow that he has been killed by me? I may be a drunkard, a gambler, fond of money, a quarrelsome fellow and anything you like. You can ring the whole gamut of vice up and down again so far as I am concerned, but no one will ever be able to prove that Captain Fouquier was coward enough to kill a defenseless man. No, no! Bring me ten armed men and I will hack them to pieces like so many flies, I'll admit, but to touch my most mortal enemy unarmed, no, never! not if I saw him asleep on sacks of gold!"

Although the captain spoke in a rough and almost brutal manner, there was a ring of sincerity in his words that went home to the heart of his audience.

"As to my daughter," continued the giant, "you think it possible that she may have killed the good man. Well, for the sake of argument, I will admit your notion. But she could not have done it alone, and besides there is the man of the sack. Who was this man? You will say it was I. Now the witness De Lozeril admits he could not see his face, but he had plenty of opportunity to notice his figure, and mine is no ordinary stature, and it must have struck the witness had it been I," and so saying Annibal drew himself up to his immense height and turned toward De Lozeril, who, thus appealed to, could not but reply:

"The man was of middle height."

"Then you see it could not have been I," pursued Fouquier, "and to whom, then, could my daughter have applied, always supposing her guilty, to help her in the accomplishment of this affair? Examine her life, study her habits and occupations, question her servants, and you will never find around her any one person whom she could have pressed into her service. She has always lived in the strictest seclusion since Brichet's disappearance, and her few visitors have been men above all suspicion."

The flippant tone adopted by Annibal in defending himself had given place to the most earnest pleading when trying to exculpate his daughter; but, now resuming his former manner, he continued:

"It is, you see, the misfortune of having a blackguard of a father for which my poor little girl is made to suffer. Now, my amiable judges, you must give it up, for if it is only on my account that you suspect my daughter, I can easily prove to you that when the *procureur* disappeared I was hundreds of miles away, engaged in consuming the pension Brichet paid to me to be relieved from my amiable presence. He loved me at a distance, the good Brichet," and at the recollection of his son-in-law, the captain burst into a roar of laughter.

Although the captain's defense was a peculiar one, to say the least, M. de Badieres was considerably impressed with its truth, and turning to De Lozeril, he asked:

"Do you persist in your declaration?"

"I persist in maintaining that the dying man bore the strongest resemblance to the portrait of Monsieur Brichet, and I declare again that the man with the sack was not nearly so big as the captain."

And Annibal interrupted :

" Yes, every one says Brichet is dead, but no one has found the body ; now I just ask you how can there be a murder without a body ?"

To this question M. de Badieres replied :

" At that time almost every night there was a murder by Cartouche and his people, and corpses were constantly picked up in the street. Brichet's assassin, whoever he was, probably returned, carried off the body and threw it into the river."

Doctor Gardi might have given another solution of the mystery, but seeing that so far things were going happily for Aurore, he had hastened to carry the good tidings to Pauline, and was therefore absent at this moment.

Observing that he had made a favorable impression, Annibal continued :

" So, you see, you don't even know whether there is any corpse to accuse us of having assassinated, and you say it was 'in order to possess his fortune.' It 's false, and I beg you to remark that we have not yet had one sou of this money, but we have paid dearly enough for it in advance by all the sufferings of the last month. Come now, my good judges, be amiable and release us, for as the will bestows this fortune on us, let us go and enjoy it."

But the greedy Annibal had overstepped the bounds of prudence, for M. de Badieres instantly retorted :

" Then you admit that Brichet is dead, for without that certainty you could not inherit."

" But it is your worship who insists on his death, not I ; although it is true that your belief is founded on the assertion of a man who confesses he was dead-drunk."

But the captain had made a second mistake, for, al-

though the audience laughed heartily at this remark, it irritated De Lozeril, who replied quickly :

"If Brichet was not struck down by you, it might have been done by some one else."

"By no one who ever crossed the threshold of the Brichet house," said the captain, with great dignity.

"Oh, indeed?" retorted the chevalier, significantly. "Perhaps there were other means of entering the house besides crossing the threshold. There was the little garden door, for instance."

"Oh, the viper!" thought Annibal.

At this insinuation Mme. Brichet smothered a cry and De Cambiac started, each foreseeing danger. It was a revelation to the judge, who now believed firmly that the baron was Aurore's lover, and that through him she had accomplished the murder of her husband.

"Prisoner De Cambiac, stand up!" ordered the judge, severely.

The baron arose, full of apprehension and dismay, but before the judge could utter a word, a man precipitated himself headlong into the hall. Half beside himself, crimson with running and almost bursting with happiness, this man was Colard, who cried, in a voice trembling with joy and beaming with an immense satisfaction :

"Innocent! Madame is innocent! My master is alive! He has just come home! M. Brichet is following me! You will see! You will see!"

CHAPTER XIV.

It is impossible to describe the scene of confusion that followed this extraordinary announcement. In vain the ushers called for silence, their voices being drowned in the tumult of excitement and noise. Exclamations were heard on all sides, the audience rising and clapping their hands for Mme. Brichet, who now became the heroine of the hour. Even the judges departed from their accustomed gravity.

"Ah," cried Annibal, "my idiot of a son-in-law arrives just in time!" and so saying he calmly stepped over the railing of the prisoner's dock and descended to the hall. He made straight for De Lozeril, who now found himself in the minority, the public looking with an evil eye on the man who had tried to compromise an innocent lady. The two rogues thus found opportunity to exchange a few rapid sentences in a low voice.

"Look here, captain, will you have a little more conversation at three hundred crowns the minute?" and Annibal scenting business, replied:

"Yes, when?"

"At the doctor's house, where I am completing my cure."

"I'll come as soon as I can," replied Annibal.

"All right, I 'll count on you."

Aurore and De Cambiac still seated in the dock had also exchanged a few words.

"Aurore, my dearest, you are saved !"

"But alas, my Raoul, you have ruined yourself for me, and you will now be the victim of your too generous devotion!" sighed poor Mme. Brichet, her beautiful eyes full of tears, as she looked fondly at her lover.

"Do not fear for me, my lovely one ! God will protect us, and now that you are cleared He will come to my aid."

De Cambiac was here interrupted by the excited acclamations of the crowd :

"Here he comes ! Here he comes !" and at the entrance of the hall appeared Brichet.

Excepting that time had somewhat whitened his hair, the *procureur* was unchanged. He appeared in good health, his complexion was fresh and rosy and his usual placid smile was on his lips ; his dapper little figure was encased in the invariable suit of broadcloth, and his good-natured face tried to assume for the occasion an expression of gravity that ill became it. Brichet advanced to the tribunal with his habitual heavy tread, and in the midst of the intense silence that had followed his entrance, said, in a voice broken with emotion :

"I come to demand the liberty of my wife and my father-in-law, falsely accused of having murdered me." So saying, he opened his arms to Aurore who, after a slight hesitation, surrendered herself to his embrace, and bursting into tears at the sight of the prisoners' dock, poor Brichet sobbed out : "Forgive me, Aurore ! Forgive my stupid disappearance which has had such terrible consequences for you !" And after another warm embrace the good man turned to Annibal and,

giving him his hand, said : "My dear father-in-law, I trust you will pardon me all the grief I have involuntarily caused you."

And, while returning the pressure of his hand, Annibal thought to himself :

"That will be an excellent pretext for getting him to double my allowance."

The trial of Annibal and his daughter being virtually at an end, the judges ordered their immediate release, but poor De Cambiac, having to pay the penalty of his noble self-sacrifice, was marched off to prison, there to await his trial. Aurore followed him with sad and longing eyes as, surrounded by the guards, he disappeared from her sight.

"I will save him !" she murmured. "I must, and I shall !"

All was confusion once more. Many of his personal friends left their seats and surrounded Brichet, offering him warm congratulations. The worthy *procureur* was quite overcome by all these demonstrations of affection and completely lost his head, addressing a lady as "sir," and calling a stout old gentleman "lovely charmer," and falling into many other very natural errors, for in truth the poor man could see nothing for the deluge of tears that blinded him. M. de Badieres, forgetting his *rôle* of judge, came in his turn to wring the hand of his good old friend, saying :

"My dear Victor, I trust you have returned to leave us no more."

And Brichet, who at that moment had dried his eyes and was thus enabled to recognize his old comrade, replied heartily :

"Yes, indeed, I promise you that ! Come and sup with us to-night, and we shall celebrate the return of the prodigal."

"I will, with pleasure."

And seeing that Brichet wished to depart, the crowd separated, leaving a passage for the *procureur* who, with his wife and his father-in-law by his side and followed by the beaming Colard, walked slowly out.

On passing De Lozeril, the chevalier leaned forward and, examining Brichet attentively, said to himself :

"Yes, there is no doubt, that is the dying man whom I saw in the sack."

We leave our readers to imagine the happy commotion in the Hotel Brichet, and how the house celebrated the joyful return of its master. A few hours later, ten old and intimate friends of the family, including M. de Badieres, were assembled around a table sumptuously served by the care of Colard, blazing with light and resplendent with burnished plate.

Seated between his wife and daughter, whom he embraced incessantly, Brichet was serenely happy, and from time to time burst forth into a transport of delight at finding himself once more surrounded by the joys of home. To each of his friends he recalled some incident of the past, to one a souvenir of some youthful escapade, and to another an occurrence of their maturer age, but to all Brichet was, as he had ever been, the same jolly, good-hearted comrade. Of all the guests, Annibal ate the most and talked the least, very deeply occupied in making up for the semi-starvation of the last thirty days, engrossed with the consideration of how he could possibly induce his son-in-law to augment his pension. But these two occupations did not necessarily preclude the possibility of a third, namely, observation of the *procureur* during the repast. Toward its close he remarked to himself :

"Yes, it is true that one learns much in travelling, for Brichet, who before his voyage drank nothing at

all, seems now to be quite able to hold his own with the best of us !"

And in truth, the worthy *procureur* continued to empty goblet after goblet at so alarming a rate, that Colard, who stood behind his chair always ready to serve him, feared for his master's sobriety. Several times he affected not to see the glass that Brichet held out to be filled, but Brichet persisted so steadily in his demands that Colard was obliged to acquiesce. The obvious consequence was that on leaving the table to pass into the *salon*, the *procureur* was certainly rather "the worse for liquor," and this was the moment chosen by Annibal to make an appeal to the tipsy generosity of his son-in-law.

"What, already !" cried Brichet.

"By Jove," thought the captain, "he has not only learned to drink, but he knows how to keep his head," disagreeably surprised at finding him as parsimonious as before.

In the *salon* M. de Badieres, seeing Brichet still lavishing caresses on his wife and daughter and puzzled how he could even have found it in his heart thus to abandon them, asked him suddenly :

"Come now, Victor, tell us why you ran away that fine morning !"

"Well, you see, my dear fellow, men will be fools at every age !" answered Brichet, looking rather shamefaced. "Sometimes one becomes tired of being happy, and without rhyme or reason sets to work to make himself miserable. Then he fancies himself deceived, and blames others for the faults of which he alone is the inventor," and turning to Aurore, he continued : "Yes, without reason he blames other people for his own stupid fancies. It is true that he afterward feels ashamed of his suspicions."

"Then why not have come back?" continued M. de Badieres, who now concluded that Brichet must have yielded to one of those fits of jealousy so common to old men. The *procureur* began to smile at this question.

"Ah, but that's quite another thing," he said. "Once a man has set off and finds himself in possession of his perfect liberty it is not so easy to come back again. He feels a youthful passion for adventure revive within him, a passion that has been repressed by long years of restraint and duty."

"Yes, yes, I understand; it was your old mania for roaming that led you on?"

"Just so; and one goes farther and farther, repeating incessantly: 'I shall go home to-morrow,' until at last one realizes the fact that he has been making this resolution for two whole years!" and Brichet made the avowal of his misdoings with so much simple drollery that every one burst out laughing. Happy at finding himself forgiven, the good man now gave an account of his travels. He had visited the whole of Southern France, Toulon, Marseilles, Provence; then venturing on the Mediterranean, he had journeyed to Malta, Messina and along the Turkish and Spanish coasts. In short, for three hours Brichet recounted minutely all his adventures by sea and land. Then enfolding his wife and daughter once more in a warm embrace, he declared:

"Well, after all my travels, I learned at last that there is no place like home and no happiness like the peace of one's own fireside."

As Brichet lifted up his eyes in gratitude to heaven, they happened to fall on the portrait of M. de Vivonne over the chimney-piece, and what did it mean? Strange to say, a slight grimace passed over his countenance at the sight of the picture hitherto regarded with so much reverence and adoration!

CHAPTER XV.

In those days, as in the present, public curiosity was as quickly extinguished as it was easily excited. For the first few days after Brichet's return, the hotel overflowed with visitors, but by the time a fortnight had elapsed no one thought of the matter. Brichet himself contributed not a little to this state of forgetfulness, rarely going out, avoiding society, and remaining, so to speak, immured in his hotel. To the very few intimate friends who reproached him with thus secluding himself, he would say, pointing to Aurore and Pauline :

"I wish now to make up for all the happiness I have so wantonly deprived myself of during the last two years."

Since his return he had renewed his old manner of living and installed himself in his own room. The years that had passed over his head seemed to have transformed his feelings for Aurore into a paternal, rather than conjugal, affection, and having visited her pavilion and admired and praised the luxury and taste there displayed, he left her at full liberty to enjoy without interruption her charming retreat. To Pauline, Brichet was ever the same generous and affectionate father as before.

"Above all things," he had said, passing his hand lovingly over her blonde curls, "don't forget that

Colard has received my strict orders to gratify all your caprices."

It was the captain alone who had reason to deplore the return of the fugitive, as he soon discovered to his cost that his halcyon days were over. Imagining that his interrupted orgies might now be resumed, Annibal invited all his boon companions to a grand carouse, and the *procureur*, not a little amazed at the unusual noise and commotion on the second floor of the hotel. naturally inquired its cause.

The following day, on the guests presenting themselves at the hotel for a renewal of festivities, they were met by Brichet, who, having begged them to choose another field for their exploits, had politely shown them to the door. On hearing of this insult to his friends, Annibal, swearing one of his great oaths, rushed to the *procureur* with the intention of chastising his insolence, but, to his amazement, Brichet remained perfectly calm.

"What does this mean?" roared the captain. "Can I not invite a few friends?"

"Why certainly, captain, as many as you like. There are plenty of taverns where you can invite them to drink with you, but in my house I can't have it. I am an elderly man, and I like to go to bed early, and I don't care to hear over my head such a row as there was last night."

"Then I am to live like a stuffed bird?" asked the captain, contemptuously.

"My dear and respected father-in-law, you know perfectly well that nothing prevents your removing from my house," said Brichet, smiling, and then adding in a dry tone: "And I would have you remember that the allowance I made you was on condition, if I mistake not, that you should live at some distance."

"Then you turn me out?" cried Annibal.

"Heaven forbid! Only I must be master in my own house."

This was said with an air of quiet decision that put an end to all further discussion, and the captain retired crestfallen, muttering:

"Yes, his travels have made him too wide-awake. He went away a sheep and now he has come back a porcupine. Devil take him! I thought I should be so comfortable with him, and now I have not a sou in my pocket."

His good luck in getting out of prison had somewhat dulled the captain's memory, but on realizing the very low state of his finances, his recollection awoke.

"Ah," cried he, "now is the time to go and talk to De Lozeril at three hundred crowns a minute, as he proposed to me the other day," and quickly crossing the garden, Annibal passed out at the little gate and hastened to the doctor's house, where De Lozeril was still living.

Nothing could have been more true than his reflection on the changed character of Brichet. No longer the timid, amiable man of sixty years, passed in the quiet, uneventful routine of office, he had acquired a will of his own that revealed itself in the flash of his eye and in a certain quiet air of authority which he assumed over his household, although he remained kind and considerate as before. His inclination to corpulency had given place to a good healthy roundness, denoting a vigorous condition, fatigue and exercise having seemingly developed and strengthened his muscles. It seemed surprising that he should bestow on Aurore nothing but a paternal affection. And yet his existence was simply that of a man in the decline of life, who cares solely for the few absolutely material

joys left to him. To eat and to sleep seemed to be his greatest pleasures, and after rising very late he would proceed with a splendid appetite to the enjoyment of his three daily repasts. From having been a man of small appetite he was now transformed into an ogre which amazed Pauline.

"You see, little girl," he would say, "I have kept up my traveler's appetite, which, unfortunately, cannot always be satisfied when on a journey, so you see I have to make up for many lost meals."

After supper Brichet would retire to his chamber, followed by Colard, whose duty it was to undress him. But it was somewhat remarkable that Colard never quitted his master's room until three or four hours later. When Pauline, astonished, asked Colard the meaning of his remaining so long every night, he replied, smiling :

"I fear, mademoiselle, that your papa is not yet cured of his passion for travelling."

"Why, you don't mean to say he thinks of going off again !" cried Pauline, alarmed.

"No, no, not at all. He is much too happy with you, mademoiselle, to think of leaving you, but as he cannot travel in person, he likes to do so in imagination ; so every night when he is in bed he makes me read to him from a pile of books of travel he brought home with him, and he listens with such interest that he keeps awake for hours."

Reassured by this explanation, Pauline thought no more of the nightly vigil, which continued as before. Certain it was that Brichet derived the keenest satisfaction from Colard's reading, and so careful was he to remain in undisturbed privacy during these hours, that he gave Colard orders before commencing to lock the door of the antechamber leading to his rooms.

"Monsieur is asleep," was the word given to the servants for any late visitors who might present themselves at the hotel. These visitors were rare, for the society of the Hotel Brichet speedily became reduced to M. de Badieres and the notary, who was also an old friend of twenty years' standing. Since his return Brichet had had several important conferences with the latter concerning his immense fortune, which was so safely and carefully invested that the notary actually gasped with astonishment on hearing Brichet propose to realize on several millions' worth of stock that he might have the ready money at his disposal.

"But what would be the good of retiring so large an amount of capital only to keep it lying unproductive?" cried the lawyer.

"I wish to have my daughter's marriage portion in my own hands, ready, for she must now be married. She is twenty years of age, and I must have her settled," replied Brichet with all the solicitude of a good father.

And the lawyer, yielding to so natural a desire, promised at once to procure the money.

But on leaving Brichet, Colard stopped him on the stairs and asked him anxiously:

"Did you notice nothing strange about my master, sir?"

"What was there to notice?" asked the notary, curiously.

Colard shook his head and answered sadly:

"Heaven grant that I may be deceiving myself, but I have a dreadful presentiment that M. Brichet has taken it into his head to go off again and that he is preparing for another trip."

"Is it for that, then, the old fool wants me to get him his money?" cried the imprudent notary.

At this revelation Colard, clasping his hands, said most earnestly :

" Do nothing of the kind, sir, for God's sake, nothing of the kind. Do not help him in his mad scheme, but don't say a single word about what I have told you. Only invent delays—gain time somehow—two or three months if you can. In that time we shall have made the dear gentleman so happy that he will have no wish to leave us."

And, touched by the grief of the good Colard, the notary had promised to delay as long as possible complying with Brichet's request.

Besides the notary, as we have said, M. de Badieres was the only other intimate friend at the hotel. At their second interview the judge had recounted to Brichet all that Cartouche had revealed in his confession.

Brichet was much amazed at the judge's recital, crying :

" What, my dear Jacques, is it possible you could really believe for a moment that I had taken up with such a gang of thieves? I 'm obliged to you for the compliment !

" By the way," continued Brichet, " you must introduce me to this young De Lozeril, who invented this story of seeing me dead. He has made himself famous."

" Oh, well, if that was his object," said the judge, " he did not count on getting that frightful wound which still keeps him at the doctor's."

" I should like to know if he will persist in his assertion after seeing me. I must see him one of these days. Where does his doctor live?"

" In the Rue St. Louis, just behind this house."

" Is it he whom they call Maurice Gardi?" asked the *procureur.*

"Do you know him?" said the judge.

"No; but I saw him from the window this morning when he came into the garden. Colard had fetched him to see Aurore," and at this name a painful expression appeared on Brichet's face, and he continued in a voice full of tender solicitude: "Yes, my poor Aurore is seriously ill from the results of that scandalous trial. My sweet love! How terribly she must have suffered in the prisoner's dock! She, who had not the very shadow of a fault to reproach herself with!"

"Keep your mind easy," he answered. "Your wife's health is in good hands. I have the highest opinion of Doctor Gardi," and M. de Badieres rose to take leave.

It was pitch-dark as M. de Badieres crossed the garden. As he approached the little door a hand was laid on his arm, while a voice said in accents of deep despair:

"In the name of all you hold most sacred, sir, take pity on an unhappy woman, who will die if you refuse to hear her."

M. de Badieres had recognized Mme. Brichet, and touched by her heartbroken appeal, he yielded to the hand that drew him toward the pavilion. A bedroom, a dressing-room and a little *boudoir* formed the whole interior, and it was into the last of these three rooms that Aurore led the judge. Besides the candles on the mantel the dainty *boudoir* was lighted by a blazing fire, sparkling and crackling in the grate, and by its reflection the judge could easily observe the great alteration in Aurore's appearance. She who but a few weeks before had been resplendent with every charm of youth and beauty, was now pale and thin, her face nervously convulsed and burning with fever, her eyes red from the tears that never ceased to flow. Aurore

had become the most lamentable spectacle, with scarcely strength to drag her weary limbs.

The judge had not yet recovered from his painful surprise, when Mme. Brichet, falling at his knees and holding out her clasped hands, cried to him, in a voice of supplicating anguish :

"Save Monsieur de Cambiac !"

At this despairing appeal, compromising as it did his duty as a magistrate, M. de Badieres forced himself to resist, and replied with feigned calmness :

"Monsieur de Cambiac, madame, is in the hands of justice. I can do nothing for him."

"He is innocent. I swear it !"

"Did he not himself confess his guilt ?"

"He deceived you, sir."

"Then let him explain the motive that tempted him to make such an avowal."

A groan seemed to rend Aurore's bosom as she answered breathlessly :

"He would rather die than explain."

Now, beneath the iron exterior of every judge there exists a man, and therefore a large amount of curiosity. M. de Bedieres, being suddenly seized with an ardent desire to fathom the secret of his friend Brichet's marital position, he resolved, if possible to extract it from Aurore. Bending over the unhappy young woman who writhed at his feet, he gently raised her, and, leading her to a large arm-chair in the chimney-corner, he said to her, in a voice of persuasive sweetness :

"Tell me the truth, dear child. You love M. de Cambiac ?"

"Yes," whispered Aurore.

"How long have you loved him ?"

"Since before my marriage. I was engaged to

Raoul, but my father broke his promise that I might marry M. Brichet."

"And you continued this guilty love?"

"Guilty!" she cried with sudden energy. "What do you mean?"

"Why, did you not resume your intimacy after your marriage?" asked the judge, astonished at Aurore's vehemence.

"No, sir. Never. Once married to M. Brichet, I cannot say I forgot Raoul or ceased to love him, but I never saw him—that I swear."

"And did he never attempt to see you?"

"Once only; he wrote a note."

"What did he say in it?"

"I don't know," said Aurore, greatly embarrassed.

"Then you refuse to tell me all the truth?"

"On my honor, sir, I am telling it to you faithfully. I opened the note and I had only time to look at the signature when M. Brichet suddenly entered. In my confusion I think I remember throwing the paper into the fire-place, where, I imagine, it must have been burned, for some hours later I could not find a vestige of it; and I am almost certain I threw it there in the first movement of surprise."

"When did this happen?"

"Three days before my husband's disappearance."

After reflecting for a moment, M. de Badieres continued:

"In the trial, you remember, the notary deposed that he thought you husband had some motive for irritation against you the day preceding his departure, when he went to his office to alter the will he had made in your favor. Do you not think it possible that this note, which you imagine to have been burned, may have been found by Brichet?"

"No," replied Aurore; "that is impossible, for we went out of the room together, and I never left M. Brichet alone a single moment, and then I returned to my room alone and searched for the note, and on not being able to find it I remembered have thrown it in the fire-place."

"Then you never replied to this letter of which you did not know the contents? When did you next meet Monsieur de Cambiac?"

"Six months after my husband disappeared we met quite by accident. At that time it was generally believed that my husband was dead. I had almost a right to think myself a widow. My heart was free and —I loved Raoul—"

"Then you consented to see him?"

"Monsieur de Cambiac claimed an interview on a matter of business. There was a certain restitution to be made to him. When we were engaged Raoul had lodged a large sum of money in my father's hands, who had—*forgotten*—to give it him back," said poor Aurore, hesitating at the word "forgotten."

"Yes, and then?" said the judge, still curious.

"Useless to say that this money was never once mentioned at our interview. We talked only of the future, all our hopes and bright projects being founded on the certainty of my husband's death."

"Was that all?" asked the judge, dryly.

At this question, of which she divined the hidden meaning, Aurore replied with fiery indignation:

"On my soul's salvation I am an honest woman. Married against my will to an old man whom I could not love, I have respected his name, and I swear to you I have defended my honor as a wife against the longings of my heart."

"Faith! Brichet has had a narrow escape," thought

the judge, convinced by Aurore's evident sincerity, and she continued :

"This rendezvous was to be our only one. When I left Raoul at the garden door, it was agreed that we should not meet again until the day that, legally free, I might have the right to love him without remorse. Raoul loves me nobly, and he accepted this sacrifice with resignation and left me."

"And you saw him no more ?" asked the judge, fascinated by her recital.

A sob burst from Aurore as she replied :

"To our misfortune it happened otherwise. Fifteen months had elapsed since this interview. Monsieur de Cambiac was insulted and a quarrel ensued over cards, which resulted in an engagement to fight with that Chevalier de Lozeril whom you saw at the trial."

M. de Badieres, deeply interested, pricked up his ears at this name.

"In the excitement of play the baron had lost four thousand crowns on parole. His adversary was so basely insulting as to refuse to fight until after the payment of this debt. Thirsting to avenge himself, but not having the money at hand, Raoul in an evil moment remembered the fifty thousand francs owed him by my father. He thought naturally that my marriage must have placed me in a position to lend him this sum, and he wrote me a few words of despair, which, short though they were, made me tremble for him, and, without knowing what danger threatened him, I consented to receive him."

Aurore bent her head and continued her recital with sobs and tears :

"Yes, I remember that dreadful day of agony. Oh, how long it was ! Raoul was here all day in this *boudoir*, always on the point of going, and always de-

tained by me in the hope that I might think of some way of raising this money. I told him I could get it, but it was not true. My life here had been so quiet and so simple I had never thought about money, and it had never occurred to me that I might be in want suddenly of a sum like this, or I might have saved it. Then I thought of asking our steward for it, but on what pretext? For he would naturally be amazed at my requiring four thousand crowns at a moment's notice. Still, I resolved to ask him. Then Monsieur de Lozeril arrived and told us that story of the murder, and you may imagine what I suffered during the dreadful hours that he remained here."

"Well, but did you get the money?" asked the judge, impatiently.

"Only in the evening. I ended by saying to myself that I was mistress in my own house, and not answerable to my servants, so summoning up my courage, I spoke to Colard, my heart beating wildly, though I managed to smile."

"Colard must have been astonished?"

"He was too respectful to show any surprise, and he replied that he had not so large a sum in hand, but that he could get it in two days from the notary, who was then absent from Paris. *Two days hence!* Do you understand? And to save the honor of Raoul I required the money within two hours, and the fatal moment was near."

"What did you do then?"

"I listened to Colard's reply with a smile on my lips, but my knees trembled under me and I could scarcely stand, and I was about to faint when something Colard said gave me a ray of hope."

"What was that?"

"On leaving me, he remarked with a smile: 'After

A MOMENT LATER PAULINE HAD APPEARED.—*See Page* 242.

all, it is perhaps as well that madame cannot have this money now, as it would only have gone into M. de Lozeril's pocket, who is gambling with the captain in his room.' From this remark I understood that Colard supposed I wanted the money for my father, and further, that at that moment he and the chevalier were playing in the hotel."

"That was the game that was mentioned in the trial?"

"Yes, but after that all that M. de Lozeril deposed was false. Listen now. On hearing what Colard said, a mad idea came into my head that perhaps my father might be winning and that he might lend me the money. As soon as I could get rid of Colard I slipped quietly up a secret staircase which opens into my father's room by a door carefully concealed in the painted woodwork. I believe no one knows of this stair but myself."

"Why do you think so?" asked the curious judge.

"Because when I was first married," replied Aurore, "I inhabited the rooms my father now has, and my husband's rooms being just below, we used this secret stair. I reached the little door opening into my father's room, and I listened. I had intended to wait until M. De Lozeril had gone, but imagine my delight when I heard them settling some account by which the chevalier owed my father six thousand crowns! 'Here is the sum,' cried M. de Lozeril, and I heard the dull noise of a parcel thrown on the table. They then withdrew to the other side of the room, and I could not hear distinctly what they said. Presently the noise of the door being closed, followed by retreating footsteps, told me that they had left the room. I opened the secret door and glided in. The first thing I saw was the packet of bank-notes. I seized on it. Raoul was saved!"

During this recital Aurore had been inspired by a kind of fictitious strength, and now appeared exhausted.

"Rest now, dear child," said the judge.

"No," she replied, "I must go on to the end. I cannot tell you the delight I felt on securing this money. It belonged to my father and he owed it to Raoul, who could thus receive it without the slightest scruple. In a few seconds I was back in the pavilion, where the baron awaited me. 'Here,' I said, 'my father sends you this. Pay M. de Lozeril and then kill him!' And I gave him the bundle of notes, which he put in his pocket. The hour had come when we must part. We were just entering the garden that Raoul might pass out by the little gate, when we heard my father shouting and evidently running in great excitement toward the pavilion. We had scarcely time to leave the garden and shut ourselves in here. Knowing that my father must have discovered his loss, and that a single word from him would reveal to Raoul that he knew nothing of the restitution, and feeling certain that the baron would then refuse to accept the money, I hastily threw open the window looking out on the Rue St. Louis, and cried to Raoul: 'Some one is coming! You must not be found here!' Without another word he jumped from the window into the street. I had scarcely closed it when my father began hammering at the door, which I then opened. I had guessed correctly. He was furious at the mysterious theft."

"And when you told him the truth he started in pursuit of the baron, did he not? And then meeting the chevalier on the way, the temptation was too strong, and he attempted to kill and rob him?"

But Mme Brichet shook her head.

"No," she said, "that is impossible, for he questioned me a good hour."

"A good hour, do you say?" asked the judge, astonished.

"It was certainly an hour," replied Aurore.

"During that hour the chevalier was assaulted," commented the judge, who had hitherto been firmly convinced that the captain had committed the crime.

"My father and Raoul are alike innocent of this infamy," insisted Aurore. "It was doubtless some common robber of the night, and Monsieur de Lozeril has taken advantage of the crime to revenge himself on Raoul. It is outrageous to say that Raoul tried to avoid his duel by committing a crime. Oh, he is a cowardly liar!"

"My child, you must not say so. Monsieur de Lozeril may have been mistaken, but I think he has been sincere in his error."

Weak as she was, Aurore raised herself in her chair, anger giving her strength, as she cried:

"Yes, he is a liar! If he were sincere why did he not tell of this bundle of bank-notes given to my father? Why did he say that when he was attacked there were *four* bundles on his person when he knew perfectly well that there were only *three?* He said nothing of the bundle he left with my father—the bundle that has so fatally compromised Raoul!" and at this beloved name Aurore wept bitterly, but she continued, with the energy of despair:

"To save my honor Raoul has declared himself guilty! But I shall save him. I will not accept this noble sacrifice; yes, I shall speak. Before Heaven and in the public court I shall proclaim the truth! Raoul shall not lose his life for my sake. I love him! Oh, I love him! And I shall cry it out before the

judges," cried Aurore, half mad with grief and passion.

"My unhappy child, have you forgotten that Brichet has returned?" asked M. de Badieres.

This name fell like a thunder-bolt on the poor girl. She fell back in her chair, panting. The light seemed to fade out of her eyes, and her face contracted nervously.

"Yes, yes, my husband!" she murmured in a scared tone, like a frightened child.

"Come, Aurore, courage!" said M. de Badieres, feeling the deepest compassion. "God, who has sent you this terrible trial has at least allowed you the consolation of being able to tender a pure and honest forehead to your husband's kiss."

A convulsive shudder ran through Madame Brichet as she murmured, inspired with a secret horror:

"Ah, yes! That kiss, it is horrible! It chills me to the bone. Ah, it is strange!"

"What do you mean?"

"Once," she replied, as if speaking to herself, "though I could not love M. Brichet I respected and liked him, but now he horrifies me."

Overcome by her confession, Aurore fainted.

M. de Badieres rushed to the door to call for help, and on the threshold he encountered Colard.

"Ah, M. de Badieres," said he, "I have come to ask for my master how Madame Brichet is feeling this evening?"

"Madame Brichet is very ill; run quickly for the doctor," ordered the judge.

Colard ran and soon returned, followed by Maurice. On looking at his patient, Maurice reassured M. de Badieres.

"It is only a fainting fit," he said. "Madame Brichet

must have had some strong emotion, which, in her present weak state, has been too much for her ; but in five minutes she will come to herself."

The magistrate retired, leaving the doctor free to restore Madame Brichet, Colard following respectfully to shut the garden door behind him.

"Do you know whether M. Brichet has had any misunderstanding with his wife ?" asked the judge, mindful of Aurore's confidence.

"The thing is impossible ; he adores his wife. You cannot imagine how wretched he is at seeing her in such poor health, sir ! He speaks of it every moment of the day, and he would not go to bed until I had come to ask for her once more."

"Shall I go up and tell him of her condition ?" suggested M. de Badieres.

"Well, sir, my master is already shut up in his room, and you know his mania," stammered Colard, apparently confused.

"Yes, yes, to be sure, it is his hour for shutting himself up with his books of travel," said the judge with a smile, recalling Brichet's craze.

Colard smiled also.

"Oh, sir," he said, "it would not be so bad if it was his books alone, but I am shut up, too ! He keeps me there reading to him for hours, when I am longing for my bed."

"I have half a mind to let you go to bed to-night and take your place as reader," said M. de Badieres, hesitating on the threshold ; but a sudden summons from the doctor for Colard and the darkness of the night prevented him from seeing the tremor that seized Colard at this proposition.

"Good-night, Colard," he said. "The doctor calls you. Another evening you shall take me up to your

master," and he passed out, Colard shutting the door quickly.

Maurice had been quite unable to revive Mme. Brichet; and after using all the usual restoratives, he had called the steward.

"Colard, go up to my room and at the left corner of my bureau you will find a little blue bottle that I had prepared to-day for Madame Brichet. Bring it here."

Colard speedily returned with the bottle. The doctor laughed.

"My word," he said, "you would make a poor apothecary."

"Why so?" asked the old man.

"You would soon make an end of your clients if you treated them to such mistakes as this!"

"Is that not the bottle you wanted, sir?"

"I told you a blue bottle and you bring me this."

"Is it not the same thing, sir?"

"Well, not quite; for with six or eight drops of this you might kill an ox in one moment."

"Oh, my God!" cried Colard, turning pale at the thought that if Maurice had not observed the mistake it might have cost Mme. Brichet her life.

"Come, run quickly and fetch me the other and put this back in its place."

But as he spoke Aurore opened her eyes.

"There. She's coming to!" said Colard, lingering.

"Go, stupid!" cried Maurice, pushing him toward the door.

When Colard returned with the blue phial it was not needed. Madame Brichet had regained consciousness.

CHAPTER XVI.

At the moment that the above scene was passing in the pavilion, the captain was engaged in his room in a most singular occupation. With his ear applied to the woodwork surrounding the apartment, he was tapping and sounding every panel with his forefinger. During the day Annibal had gone to the doctor's house to visit De Lozeril. On his arrival he found the invalid reposing on a sofa.

"Ah," cried the chevalier, "here is my amiable cut-throat at last."

Instead of resenting this epithet, Annibal burst out laughing.

"Indeed, if you had really thought about it twice you would have seen what a stupid idea of yours that was."

"Why stupid?" asked De Lozeril.

"Because, if I had seriously undertaken to do the business I would have done it well."

"Really?"

"You have my positive assurance," returned the captain, quietly; and then, as if he were discussing some conventional subject, he added. "I do not know what fate may have in store for us, but if it should

ever be my lot to have to kill you, rest assured I shall do my work right well."

Despite all his bravery, these cold-blooded words sent a shudder through the chevalier, and he was impelled to say :

"But I hope that now we are to be friends, my dear Fouquier !"

"Eh ? Who knows ?" said Annibal, with a little grimace, "you have such a queer way of treating your friends. You go and write stupid compromising letters about them and then get yourself stabbed in the street, and the police get hold of your beautiful effusions and take them for gospel. You can't do that, my dear fellow. You can't do that and expect to keep your friends !" In expressing himself thus, Annibal seemed so good-natured and sincere that the chevalier felt shaken in his conviction that the captain was his assailant.

"Come, now, Fouquier, don't bear any malice. I own I did a stupid thing then. I give you my hand !"

"Is that all you are going to give me ?" asked Annibal.

"And what more do you want ?"

"Faith ! I want my packet of bank-notes that helped you to get De Cambiac in the toils. You must admit it served your purpose uncommonly well."

"My dear fellow, could you ever think—" began De Lozeril, attempting a denial ; but Annibal cut him short by saying :

"Well, well, it is all the same to me—don't trouble yourself. All I care about is the return of my bundle of bank-notes."

The chevalier pointed to the table where the money was lying, and said :

"There, my dear Annibal, take back your own !"

The captain extended his hand greedily.

"Hello! Look out!" cried De Lozeril quickly. "You're taking two packets instead of one."

"Ah, so I am," said Fouquier, regretfully letting one go.

"Now that you have got your money, allow me to ask you a question. Can you explain how that bundle of notes got into the hands of the baron?"

"Well, I can't tell you anything positively, but I have a supposition to offer."

"What is it?"

"That my daughter, though she has denied it through thick and thin, had something to do with it."

"Did you give her the money to keep for you?"

"Not a bit of it. She simply stole it, the little devil!"

"Never!"

"That astonishes you, does it? Well, you remember that when you gave me the bundle of notes I laid it on the chimneypiece?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, when we left the room, I carefully shut the door behind us. When I came back—no money there—clean gone. So that my supposition is there must be a secret door in my room."

These words recalled a fact to De Lozeril also, and he cried eagerly:

"Yes, there is a door!"

"How do you know?" asked Fouquier, amazed.

The chevalier told him how on that memorable evening he had seen Colard go directly to a certain angle of the room where there was no visible exit, and how the chevalier's exclamation had suddenly recalled Colard to his senses.

"This secret door must exist, captain," he said, in conclusion, "and you must find it."

"I have tried everywhere," declared Annibal. "I thought there must be a stair communicating with the garden, but there is no door of any kind outside the house."

"Then the staircase must be between the first and second stories," suggested De Lozeril.

"If that were so it would be queer," grinned the captain, "for then I could get down into Brichet's rooms, which are so carefully locked up in his absence."

"Do you suppose he leaves his keys lying on the table?" asked the chevalier.

"Oh, come! What do you take me for?" cried Annibal, pretending to be shocked.

"And, if this stair exists, are you sure it goes to Brichet's rooms?"

"Oh, perfectly."

"What a pity?" sighed De Lozeril. "I only wish it went to Pauline's."

"Get along with you! You don't mean to say you're still after that little game. I thought Brichet's return put that out of your head for good and all."

"On the contrary, I intend to go straight to Brichet and ask him for his daughter's hand."

Annibal burst into a roar of laughter.

"Bless your innocence!" he cried. "Don't you wish you may get it?"

The chevalier was offended at his raillery, but the captain proceeded:

"Look here, my friend. It is useless for us to flatter each other or to choke ourselves with compliments. We're a couple of scoundrels, and neither of us is worth a red herring. Now, Brichet is one of those prudent, economical, shrewd men of the middle class that

hates our kind. He has quite enough in having a father-in-law like me without adding a son-in-law of the same kind to his collection. I tell you at the very first hint you give him of your 'intentions' he will politely show you the door."

"Bah!" said De Lozeril, with a shrug.

"Oh, but there is no 'bah' about it! The old fellow is a mule that nobody can make drink when he isn't thirsty."

"Oh, by taking proper measures one might succeed, I think."

Annibal burst out laughing.

"You may tickle him as much as you like, but find out his sensitive point you never will, for he hasn't got one."

"Oh, hasn't he though!" retorted De Lozeril, crossly. "My dear friend, every man has a sensitive point if you can only find it."

"You don't imagine you have found the sensitive point of my son-in-law?"

"Well, I have been reflecting on what motive Brichet can have in preserving an absolute silence as to the murderous attack of which he was certainly the victim. When I discover his motive for that, I have my man."

"But, my good friend, there's no motive to find; he never was attacked; there isn't the slightest scratch upon him."

"You may tell that to the marines, captain."

"No, but seriously, chevalier, you don't rely on the story of the man in the sack?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, but you know, old fellow, you admit you were so awfully drunk that night."

De Lozeril interrupted the captain sternly.

"I saw Brichet the other day in the Hall of Justice, and I tell you he was the same man I saw in the sack."

"With an awful wound in the neck, eh?"

"Yes, just like mine. One would think the same arm had struck us both."

"Bosh!" answered Annibal.

"Well, look at Brichet's neck, and you will see I am right."

The captain shook his head and reiterated:

"Bosh, I tell you! The very night he came back he stooped down to poke the fire in the dining-room, and then I saw his neck distinctly."

"Well?" asked De Lozeril anxiously.

"I can swear his neck is no more wounded than mine," answered the captain, gravely.

"Then he is not Brichet."

"Rather say your friend in the sack wasn't Brichet."

This conclusion was so just that De Lozeril's faith in his own belief was shaken.

Annibal continued:

"I can understand how you may have been deceived by a strong resemblance, but for me that would be impossible. Oh, I warrant you he is my son-in-law, body and soul, and no mistake. I recognized him only too well—first by his face, then by his voice, his manner, his habits, his recollection of the merest trifles, his whims, his manias, and last, but not least"—and here poor Annibal heaved a tremendous sigh—"his obstinate refusal to give me money. "An impostor might succeed in deceiving outsiders, but the members of a man's family could never be, for there are a thousand little trifles that speak for themselves. After two long years Brichet has come back and set himself down in his own chair in its own corner. His little jokes and his old repartee are just the same. He goes

to the window and drums the same tune on the same pane of glass, while watching the rain. He likes or dislikes the same old dishes, and after dinner he sits crumbling his bread just as he did before. Every moment he asks why something has been put on the left that used to be put on the right, and he even asked for his old clothes that Pauline had given away. Yes, yes, I tell you a man might personate another in a general way, but in trifles known only to his family he would be certain to fail."

"Yes, you are right there," said De Lozeril, completely convinced.

"Oh, faith! From head to foot he's Brichet all over. Only his travels have made him more energetic and more selfish in holding on to his money. A little while ago you were talking about his sensitive point. By Jove! I wish I could find the sensitive point that would make him part with his crowns!"

De Lozeril could not help laughing at the captain's despair, as he continued:

"And yet I did hope for a moment I had found it out; yes, the evening of his arrival at supper I really thought he had brought back with him the most delicious of all vices. I thought he had actually learned to drink. My word, didn't he pitch into the wine that night! But, alas, it was for one night only, for the next day he was at his '*eau roujie*' again just the same as ever! So it is very clear that drinking is not his sensitive point."

"But he must have it, and we must find it!"

"Oh, yes, of course he has one, but it's no earthly good to us. It's a mania for travel."

"And these two years of roaming have not cured him?"

"Well," replied Annibal, "if one is to believe the

ravings of that old driveling idiot, Colard, we must be prepared to see Master Brichet on the march again before long. Under pretext of realizing a marriage portion for Pauline, he has ordered the notary to sell out stock to the tune of two or three millions."

De Lozeril pricked up his ears.

"What," he cried, "three millions?"

"Neither more nor less, and some fine morning Master Brichet will slip through our fingers with this nice little sum for traveling expenses. It appears that the old fool is so cracked about his blessed travels that every night he keeps Colard reading for hours, and nothing but accounts of voyages please him."

"What! *Every night?*" asked the chevalier, his suspicions aroused.

"Yes, and with all the doors locked so that they may not be disturbed."

"I smell a rat!" cried the chevalier.

"Where?" asked Annibal, puzzled.

"Supposing the sensitive point was *there*. Look here, old fellow, you try to find out whether Brichet really spends his nights in listening to Colard reading books of travel."

"And how the devil am I to know?"

"Go into his room and see."

"But I told you he has all the doors double locked," remonstrated the captain.

"What, do you stick at such a trifle as that?"

"Well, rather," said Annibal, contemplating his own huge body. "You don't imagine I can get through the keyhole, do you? It's true I might break in the door with a hatchet, only that isn't a very good way of getting into a room when you don't want anybody to hear you."

"True," said De Lozeril, and he fell into a deep revery, broken by heartfelt sighs.

"I must say," remarked Annibal, "you take my affairs very much to heart."

"Yes, for, you see, your affairs are to a certain extent my own. As I am anxious to marry Pauline, I do not relish the idea of Brichet walking off calmly with his millions."

"Hum, hum," growled the captain, not much charmed at the prospect of having to share Brichet's fortune with De Lozeril. But the young man appeared not to notice Annibal's bad humor, and murmured to himself :

"Ah, if I were only well, I should go myself, and I know I should find it out."

"Find what out?" asked Annibal, curious.

De Lozeril pretended to be embarrassed, and cried :

"Ah, you read my thoughts !"

"Not very difficult when you speak them out loud !" laughed the captain.

"To tell you the truth, my good Annibal, I was thinking of that secret door which must exist in your room."

"What were you thinking about it ?"

"I was thinking that it must open on a stair connecting the two stories. Don't you see how ?"

"I believe you, and we should be able to get into Brichet's room without the trouble of breaking in the door with a hatchet !"

"And then you would soon find out whether your son-in-law is so very fond of listening to books of travel, you know."

"What a splendid idea !"

"Yes, but the main point is to discover the door," remarked the practical chevalier.

"I will go at once and set to work," said Annibal quickly, rising to go.

"All right, and as soon as you have any news for me I count on your letting me know," added the chevalier, giving his hand to Fouquier, who, holding it in his large grasp, said, as if speaking to himself :

"Let's see, didn't the chevalier ask me to come and talk with him at three hundred crowns a minute?"

De Lozeril took the hint and cried :

"Why, yes, and I was about to commit a most unpardonable forgetfulness in overlooking the payment for your precious time. Just take one of those bundles of bank-notes lying on the table."

"Thanks," said the crafty Annibal. "Really, I was not thinking at all about it; but as you wish it, I will comply," and the captain seized another packet, which disappeared in the depths of his pocket.

The two scoundrels separated with the warmest protestations of friendship, but the door had no sooner closed than the chevalier remarked :

"That old ruffian is a precious deal too greedy, and I shall take good care he doesn't get the chance of making himself sick over Brichet's millions."

While De Lozeril thus moralized, Fouquier also had time to reflect. On reaching the foot of the staircase he said to himself :

"If De Lozeril dies of choking, it won't be from swallowing the fortune of my son-in-law."

The result of this interview was that Fouquier, as we have seen, immediately set on a tour of investigation in his apartment. Examining the woodwork for the second time, but still without any result, it occurred to him that another means might be more successful ; so taking a lighted candle in his hand, he began the experiment anew. At every corner, at the

tiniest crack, at the smallest interstice, between the panels or the molding, he held the light, but the flame always went straight up without the slightest inclination to flicker.

"Where the mischief can it be?" growled Annibal, beginning to lose patience. "But, ah! At last! Eureka!"

In the corner, near the chimney-piece, the flame bent over to one side, a small current of air escaping from a joint in the molding.

"That 's it," cried Annibal, joyfully. "The air from the staircase must be blowing through that crack." The rest was easy. "As simple as saying 'good morning,'" he said to himself, pressing the spring with his finger. The door flew open, and he saw before him a little spiral stair cut into the thickness of the wall.

"We will visit our dear son-in-law," said the captain, venturing on the tiny stair, which scarcely seemed fitted for one of his corpulency. Thirty steps below he came to a door exactly resembling the one above. Annibel held up the candle and carefully examined the spring.

"Good," said he, "same as the other." He blew out the light and then gently opened the little door, advancing with cautious footsteps. He found himself in the *salon* opening on Brichet's bedroom, whence there issued a strong light, enabling the captain to see pretty clearly.

All was silent; but presently a sound fell on his experienced ear that was not to be mistaken.

"That 's the drawing of a cork and the pouring out of wine," thought the astonished captain. Advancing on tiptoe, he gained the door of the bedroom and peeped in. Words are powerless to describe the stupefied amazement of Annibal at what he beheld.

Alone, before a table on which were a number of bottles, more than half of them empty, his eyes heavy, his under lip protruding and his face flushed, Brichet was engaged in trying, with a shaky hand, to fill an enormous glass and carry it to his lips !"

"Drunk as a lord !" said the captain to himself, with the most sincere admiration ; and Brichet was drunk indeed, in that state of heavy intoxication that utterly extinguishes a man's intelligence, turning him into an idiot or even lower than brute beasts.

"Seven, eight, nine ! Faith, the old gentleman is making a pace !" murmured Annibal, as he counted the bottles consumed by Brichet ; and then, like the old war horse, whose nostrils quiver at the smell of powder, Annibal lovingly inhaled the perfume of these solitary libations.

"By Jove, that 's good wine. The very best. The old villain !" he said enviously, and at that moment Brichet again raised the enormous glass to his lips and drained it without drawing breath.

"Well done," thought the captain, "I couldn't have done better myself," as he followed the operation with the air of a connoisseur ; then smiling, he said to himself :

"And I, who was such an ass as to believe he never drank anything stronger than *eau roujie*—I declare I begin to respect the old humbug."

The sight of the regiment of bottles on the table had such an irresistible fascination for the giant that he could not help advancing nearer. In doing so he stumbled against a large arm-chair that barred the way. At the sudden noise the drunkard raised his heavy head and asked in a thick voice :

"Is that you, Colard ?"

"Ah, yes, his fine reader !" chuckled Annibal to

himself in high glee, standing perfectly still ; but, as if in response to Brichet's appeal, the key was turned in the door of the antechamber and Colard entered.

Fouquier slipped behind one of the heavy window curtains and watched Colard, who locked the door of the outer room, and crossing the *salon*, entered Brichet's bedroom. The door was shut behind him so that Annibal could see no more, and could only depend for further information on his ears. He approached softly and listened.

"Ah, here you are at last. What kept you so late?" asked Brichet.

"I was detained in the pavilion, as madame was taken very ill."

"Oh, indeed, and so my beloved wife is ill, is she?" asked Brichet, with a sarcastic indifference that dumfounded the captain.

"I left Doctor Gardi, and he will remain all night, in case of another attack," replied Colard.

"Ah! Very convenient! Handsome young doctor! He likes the pretty brunette, does he?" sneered the *procureur*, with little of the manner of a jealous husband.

"You are wrong there, for the doctor only came because I was sent to fetch him."

"You were sent! Who sent you, I should like to know?" asked Brichet savagely.

"Monsieur de Badieres, who, on leaving you this evening, went to the pavilion to visit Madame Brichet."

"Ah, then it's the judge who's sweet in that direction, is it? And does he think he 's going to pass his life here, the old imbecile?" cried Brichet in a tone of drunken ill-humor.

"Do you mean to say you would quarrel with the magistrate?" asked Colard, quickly.

"No, but he bores me all the same. I 'd rather have the company of that out-and-out ruffian Annibal any day."

The amazement of Fouquier may be imagined at hearing the sarcasms thrown by Brichet at his wife and his most intimate friend, but his sentiments changed to absolute stupefaction on thus hearing himself preferred to M. de Badieres. He, for whom Brichet had ever shown the deepest repulsion !

"What !" he said to himself, feeling intensely flattered. "Is it possible Brichet can mean *me ?*" But on reflection, he added with sincere regret. "What a fool I am ! Of course the old fellow is as drunk as a piper and doesn't know what he' s saying. Well, well," he continued, "it 's downright shameful to drink like that all alone, when one has a father-in-law like me, so ready to join him !"

Here the voice of Brichet cried hoarsely :

"Colard. Quick, bring more bottles !"

"More ! Good God !" thought the captain.

"No, no, you have drunk enough," answered the major-domo, quietly.

"Do you mean to say you refuse me wine, you blackguard ?"

"Yes," said Colard, shortly.

"Didn't you promise me I should drink as much as ever I liked ?" roared the *procureur*.

"You have made enough promises to me that you haven't kept," replied Colard, dryly.

"What did I promise ? To hide myself from Pauline and Aurore when I drank. Don't I let you lock me up every night ?" cried Brichet, more and more furious.

"You made another promise beside that."

"Ah, so I did. The one you make such a fuss about !" cried Brichet, with a mocking laugh.

"Sign that document directly and you shall have all the wine you want."

"To-morrow," growled the drunkard.

"No, now; it won't take you five minutes. We have here everything we require, and you must do as I tell you."

"What the devil does he want to get out of him," thought Annibal, trying vainly to understand. He heard the moving of a piece of furniture, and then the voice of Colard saying:

"Come, sit down at this table and do what I require."

"I don't feel capable of doing it well. I am not sufficiently practiced. I shall make a mess of it—that I swear?"

"Try, at all events, and I shall judge."

"All right, I 'll try," consented Brichet, and the sound of an arm-chair being pushed away told the captain that the *procureur* had risen; then his heavy and uncertain footsteps shuffling along the ground proved that he was trying to reach the other table of which Colard had spoken; but the *procureur* suddenly appeared to change his mind, for he stopped half way, and with a stupid, drunken laugh exclaimed:

"Fiddle de dee!"

"What, won't you do it?" asked Colard.

"Fiddle de dee!" repeated the drunkard.

"You promised me most faithfully," began Colard, but he was interrupted by Brichet, who, betwixt laughs and hiccoughs, stammered out:

"Look here, you blockhead, I am pretty drunk, but not drunk enough for that. It would be downright idiocy if I should choose to go on living here, happy and quiet, eating and drinking the best. Wait patiently, old man. The time will come."

"When?" asked the steward shortly.

"When I get sick of this luxurious but monotonous existence, and the whim takes me to be off some fine morning."

"Evidently he is thinking of decamping again," said Annibal to himself, catching this last phrase, the only one of the whole conversation that had been in any degree intelligible to him. Brichet now apparently returned to his seat, for the next sound he heard was the *procureur* crying imperiously:

"Now, bring more wine!"

"No, I tell you, you've drunk enough. You had better go to bed," urged Colard.

"Wine, I tell you!" roared the drunkard, furious.

"Come, now, be reasonable," began Colard, but he was again stopped short by the *procureur*, who shouted in a drunken frenzy:

"Wine! Hell and thunder, more wine!" and then there followed a frightful noise of glass-breaking. It was Brichet, who pitched the empty bottles one after another around the room, howling with maudlin ferocity: "More wine! More wine!"

"Hold your tongue! Be quiet!" supplicated Colard, terrified; but the drunken man was deaf to all reason, and in a blind fury reiterated:

"Bring me more wine, or I shall go down and fetch it myself!"

"That you won't!" answered Colard. "What, show yourself to Pauline and the servants in that state!"

But opposition, seemingly only added fuel to the flame, for now the captain heard a tremendous shock and the *salon* was suddenly flooded with light, Brichet having, with a vigorous blow, burst in the bedroom door and thrown himself into the room with a view of

thence gaining the staircase and putting his threat in execution.

Annibal had scarcely time to retreat behind his sheltering curtain, when Brichet, having reached the center of the *salon*, all at once stopped short, and crying, hoarsely: "More wine!" raised his hands quickly to his forehead, staggered and fell senseless to the ground.

Colard, who had closely followed him, threw himself down beside his master.

"Dead! Is he dead?" he stammered in a broken voice, and, exerting an almost superhuman strength, the old man lifted in his arms the heavy, lifeless mass and carried it to the bed.

He examined anxiously the rigid features, noting the livid hue.

"What shall I do? My God! How to save him!" said the faithful old servant, beside himself with terror.

"Ah!" he said. "The doctor promised to stay all night with madame; I shall call him," and he disappeared, running.

Left alone, Annibal quitted his retreat, and walking to the bed, gazed calmly at the insensible man.

"Bah!" he said, with a gesture of disgust. "I know what that means; wine and rage combined have produced a nice little fit of apoplexy! Well, the room will soon be full of people. I must go.'

He had scarcely closed the secret door when Colard arrived with Maurice. On entering the bedroom the doctor ordered the windows opened. While the old servant ran to obey, Maurice approached the bed.

The reader will doubtless remember that when Brichet appeared at the tribunal, Maurice had quitted the Hall of Justice. This was, therefore, the first time

he had ever been face to face with the father of his beloved Pauline. He bent over the sick man, but his eyes no sooner fell on the face of his patient than he started back, deadly pale, and a prey to some violent emotion. He hesitated for a moment, then, with a feverish hand tearing open Brichet's shirt, he examined his neck eagerly.

"Strange!" he murmured.

Colard, having been occupied in opening all the windows, did not see the movement.

"You will save poor, dear Brichet; won't you, sir?" he asked in a voice trembling with anguish.

"Yes, Colard. I'll answer for him," replied the doctor, who had quite regained his composure.

CHAPTER XVII.

On the day following the scene described in the last chapter, the chevalier left the doctor's house for the first time and went to the hotel of the Marquise de Brageron. Without a moment's delay he was ushered to the lady's presence. She received him in a little *boudoir*, whose sacred doors opened only for her most intimate friends. De Lozeril, knowing well her custom, was somewhat dismayed at finding this distinction conferred on him by the lady who had so readily consented to a rupture.

"Can she be thinking of taking back the liberty she gave me?" he thought.

Proud, vindictive and arbitrary, the marquise made a pastime of love. She had many admirers, but only one had awakened a gleam of human tenderness within her marble breast. There soon came the humiliation of finding her affection despised, and she, who had inflicted so much cruel suffering on others, had now to submit to the pain and ignominy of abandonment by the only man she had ever truly loved, the Baron de Cambiac.

Finding herself thus scorned, there awakened within her another sentiment—hatred. Everything concerning Raoul seemed to add fuel to the flame of her

bitter hatred, and even his devotion in sacrificing himself for Aurore's life and honor only redoubled her animosity.

She had flushed with shame and anger when the valet had announced M. de Lozeril; she felt humiliated that her scheme of revenge on Raoul should induce her to accept the aid of such a man, and it made her the more furious against De Cambiac that on his account she should have condescended to such baseness.

De Lozeril was, therefore, much deceived when he imagined that the marquise had any desire to renew their friendship. Far from stirring any chord of tenderness in her heart, his presence only inspired her with disgust. Nevertheless she received him with a smile on her lips, congratulating him on his convalescence. But when he announced his intention to leave the doctor's, the marquis upbraided him for such an unwise proceeding, reminding him of the compact into which they had entered concerning Pauline and her fortune, alleging that she could no longer be near his beauty, and consequently not in a position to pursue so easily his speculation.

"Oh—oh, marquise, speculation! What a shocking word!"

"Well, we may as well call a spade a spade, my dear. You know very well that Mademoiselle Pauline's greatest charm in your eyes is her millions; so I say it is most imprudent of you to put yourself out of the way at the very moment you ought to have an eye on the enemy's camp."

"But I have an ally who will keep a lookout for me."

"And who is he?"

"Captain Annibal Fouquier."

The marquise shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"I never thought you were such a fool! I could appreciate your alliance with Annibal when you both expected to inherit the dead man's shoes, but now that Brichet has returned to wear the shoes himself, it is quite another thing. Now Fouquier will naturally look after his daughter's interests."

"Oh, I shall look after him," replied the chevalier, smiling.

"Take care, don't trust him! Annibal is a most dangerous adversary; either he will get the better of you, or, if you succeed in outwitting him, he will crush you like the utter brute he is."

The calm assertion of the marquise forcibly reminded De Lozeril of Annibal's assurance of the previous day: "If it shall ever be my lot to have to kill you, I shall do my work right well," and the chevalier shuddered.

Mme. de Brageron continued:

"While he vows friendship to you outside the hotel, believe me, he will take care you don't get inside until he has the *procureur* well in hand."

"Indeed," cried De Lozeril, bursting with laughter, "why, Brichet can't endure the very sight of him!"

"But who knows what may happen, and whether something quite unforeseen may not put Brichet in his power? The captain and Aurore between them would soon manage to feather their own nest, and what then would become of the millions that makes Pauline's eyes so bright to your deluded gaze? Tell me, now, how many other allies can you count in that house?"

"Not one. Pauline knows nothing about me. The doctor cannot assist me in any way. I could not ask the support of M. de Badieres, for I firmly believe he

detests me ; and as for Aurore, of course, she hates me on account of her beloved Raoul. So, you see, I am absolutely reduced to holding on to Annibal as my only chance."

"Did you not speak the other day of an old valet ?" reflected tbe marquise.

"Colard ?"

"Yes ; what sort of a man is he ?"

"Oh, a good old house-dog, devoted to his master, and having no will but his. I can do nothing with him."

"Well, then, listen, chevalier ; this is my advice : You must enter boldly the Hotel Brichet, where you may count upon as many enemies as there are inhabitants, then go straightway to Brichet and ask his daughter's hand."

The chevalier, amazed at the audacity of the plan, replied that it was quite useless.

"Why do you say useless ?" asked the marquise.

"Because," objected the chevalier, "it is well known that I have no fortune, and—"

"That you are an adventurer of the very worst possible reputation," continued Mme. de Brageron tranquilly.

"Oh, come, marquise, you are too severe," stammered De Lozeril.

"But if you dare not try the experiment yourself," suggested the marquise, "why don't you get some one to try it for you ? One, of course, whose name, rank and position would cover all those deficiencies in the man represented."

"Who would undertake such a commission for me ?" cried De Lozeril.

"I," she cried in a cruel, hard voice, "and I intend to go into that house and meet face to face the woman

who has robbed me of Monsieur de Cambiac. It is not enough for me to bring disgrace on him, for I will bring her to misery and despair. Yes, I shall enter that house, and if I can only get a footing I shall make her pay dearly for the triumph that has cost me so many bitter tears."

De Lozeril listened calmly to this explosion of spiteful rage, reflecting on the advantage of the acquisition of such an ally in his contest with the captain.

Mme. de Brageron, having regained her composure, continued :

"I will do all I can to help you in winning Pauline, but in return I expect you to help me in my vengeance on Aurore. Is this a bargain ?"

"You have my assurance," replied De Lozeril.

"Very well. Then give up your idea of leaving the doctor's house. Your visit of to-day will have fatigued you. You are not yet very strong ; in short, invent some pretext for remaining with the doctor and in the neighborhood of the hotel."

The chevalier bowed in acquiescence.

"Some time during the day I shall present myself at the *procureur's*. Now go."

Thus dismissed, De Lozeril went his way.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the previous evening, when Colard, at a late hour, had rushed out in search of the doctor, the sensation created among the domestics of the hotel by the old man's agitated movements may be imagined. It was not long before every servant in the house had presented himself at the door of Brichet's apartments to tender his assistance. One after another had noticed, with amazement, the scene of disorder, for Colard, in his confusion, had not time to conceal the traces of his master's carouse. The array of empty bottles, the fumes of the wine that had been carelessly spilled in all directions, and the half-empty glass standing on the table, were all evidences of the real nature of Brichet's pretended "readings."

Pauline, whose rooms were in the other wing of the hotel, had heard nothing of all this noise. The captain, after having regained his apartments by the secret staircase, sat down in a large arm-chair and was soon lost in thought.

"Let 's see," he reflected. "Is it necessary for me to tell De Lozeril about what I have just seen, or shall I keep it to myself? When I agreed to share equally with the chevalier, Brichet was still absent and I knew nothing about the contents of his will; I thus secured the half, supposing that my idiot of a son-in-law had

left nothing to Aurore. But now it is quite another affair, for Brichet has returned and, so far as I know, has not changed the will he made in favor of Aurore, so that all I have to do is to keep the old fellow in good humor. And what is De Lozeril going to do? To get his share by marrying Pauline! Well, I must take good care that the greedy fellow does not upset my basket, and that he does not ingratiate himself with Brichet." And the captain smiled with satisfaction. "Perhaps I won't have to watch so very long, for these fits of apoplexy often carry people off in a twinkling; in which case Master de Lozeril may take to his heels as speedily as possible. But whatever happens, I may be quite easy, for I know henceforth how to manage my tipsy son-in-law. 'Find out his sensitive point,' says De Lozeril, 'and we shall do the trick together.' Very well, my dear friend, here it is, and now you go to the deuce and I will do the trick myself," and Annibal, chuckling, rubbed his hands in high glee. "Ha, ha! Master Brichet loves good wine, does he? Well, he shall have as much as ever he likes in spite of old Colard." But here the captain paused in his pleasing reflections. The name of the valet started a new train of thought. Why should Colard so strongly urge Brichet to assent to something, and why should the *procureur* persist that he was not yet sufficiently practiced? What could the thing be which Colard promised to reward with more wine? The captain was curious and vaguely alarmed, and for the next hour puzzled over the mystery. "Can Colard be a designing rascal who is trying to turn his master's intoxication to his own benefit?" But then, why should he manifest so much anxiety and even despair at his master's lifeless condition? "No, no," said the captain, "Colard is not a rogue. Not know-

ing I was there, he had no need to pretend such devotion ; his agitation was natural."

The noise on the stairs now became so deafening, the servants rushing hither and thither, that Annibal thought it prudent to emerge from his seclusion, lest his continued silence should awaken suspicion; so assuming the appearance of one just roused from sleep, he went quickly from his room to the first floor, where he met one of the valets leaving Brichet's room.

"What's the matter, Louis? What's all this noise about?" he asked, feigning a great yawn.

"Oh, captain, don't you know Monsieur Brichet is dying?"

Annibal's ingenuous countenance expressed the most painful astonishment as he exclaimed :

"Good God! Is it possible? My beloved son-in-law! We must send instantly for the doctor."

"Doctor Gardi is already with him, sir."

"And what does he say?" asked the captain with the most distracted solicitude.

"Alas!" replied the man, "the doctor has bled Monsieur Brichet, but he has not as yet shown any sign of life. He lies there as stiff as a stick and as red as a poppy. I believe it 's all up with him, sir," and the valet shook his head sadly.

"All up with him!" repeated Annibal with a sigh. "And if he should die without the consolation of being surrounded by those he loves?"

These words reminded the valet of a duty that had been forgotten in the sudden confusion, and he said :

"That is true, sir. I will run for madame and mademoiselle," but the captain stopped him.

"No, no, my good Louis," he said, "let the poor ladies alone. It will be time enough to wake them at the last moment. But summon Monsieur de Badieres

and Maitre Bandinau, two devoted friends of your master. They will be grateful for being called in time to press his hand once more. Run, Louis, and tell them," and the captain watched the servant hastening on his errand with much satisfaction.

"There, now my mind is easy," thought he, "for if De Lozeril should say I made an end of Brichet, I shall have two good witnesses to give him the lie," and well pleased with himself Annibal passed into his son-in-law's bedroom. As the valet had said, Brichet had not yet regained consciousness. Seated by his bedside was Maurice, watching the sick man, who was slowly reviving.

"He is regaining consciousness," whispered the doctor to Annibal, who entered on tiptoe with a woe-begone air. Annibal took a seat quietly beside Colard.

Ever since he had been called, Maurice had remained in a deep reverie, his eyes fixed on the *procureur*. Several times, however, he turned, and, looking earnestly at Colard, seemed about to speak, but the words died on his lips. Now, however, Maurice seemed entirely absorbed in the care of his patient, and after an hour's intense anxiety, Annibal heard the doctor pronounce with great satisfaction :

"He is saved."

"Devil take that doctor," thought the captain. "Why can't he tell us something agreeable ?"

Brichet opened his eyes, and, on seeing the captain, an expression of satisfaction showed itself on the sick man's face, much to Annibal's amazement. At that moment the judge and notary arrived, joyfully holding out their hands to Brichet, whom they expected to find in the last agony. Their greetings over, Brichet's first thought was for poor old Colard.

"My good Colard," he said, affectionately, "you see,

now, I am in excellent company; take advantage of it and go sleep a few hours. At your age, sitting up all night is too much for one's strength. Go, my friend, go and sleep, and these gentlemen will stay with me."

M. de Badieres and the others joined in entreating Colard to heed his master's injunction.

Whereon the old man bowed to the gentlemen and left the room.

"He seems to go with regret," remarked the notary.

"He is so fond of me," said Brichet, with emotion, "the good fellow!"

A minute later, the invalid complained of his head being too low, and Annibal, being close to the bed, hastened to adjust the pillows. As he bent over the bed, Brichet whispered quickly in his ear:

"Annibal, I beseech you not to leave me alone with Colard for an instant."

No one else had heard a single word, or even seen Brichet's lips move; and Annibal could scarcely believe his senses as he gazed in astonishment at the still and impassive face of the *procureur*, bnt he received Brichet's recommendation with silent stoicism.

The doctor now rose to take leave, and Brichet, opening his eyes at the slight movement in the room, turned toward him and asked:

"What do you prescribe for me, doctor?"

"Rest, for the present."

"And for the future?"

"Give up drinking, or another attack like this will kill you."

After this warning, and as if he would shake off the somber fancies that had haunted him during his attendance in the sick-room, Maurice walked swiftly toward the door. He paused on the threshold, and,

half turning back, gazed long and earnestly at his patient, as if about to speak, but suddenly changing his mind, he passed through the doorway, without having uttered a word.

"I thought the doctor was going to give us some parting injunctions," remarked M. de Badieres.

"Yes," said the notary, "he stood there, apparently, thinking what he should say."

"Oh, you don't see the joke," cried Annibal, gayly. "The doctor is like all the rest of his profession. They don't like leaving a patient without being asked to come again."

"The captain is right," said Brichet with a smile, already ungrateful to the man who had just saved his life.

On leaving the *procureur's* bedroom, Maurice stood still in the middle of the *salon*, lost in thought. So deep was his reverie, that he did not observe the peaceful figure that advanced to meet him, and only woke from his pre-occupation when a sweet voice asked him eagerly :

"You have saved my father, have you not, Monsieur Maurice ?"

At sight of Pauline, Maurice changed color.

"Yes,, mademoiselle, do not be anxious. He is out of danger."

"Oh, I am so glad !" cried the young girl, raising her lovely eyes to his face and holding out her hand with grateful happiness ; but on touching his, she exclaimed, with simplicity : "What makes you tremble so ?"

For an answer, Maurice's fingers closed around the soft little hand that lay so confidingly in his, and he drew Pauline to the opposite side of the room, as far as possible from Brichet's bedroom. Pauline looked

at him with surprise, but there was so much grave and tender supplication in the eyes that met hers, that resistance was impossible.

"Mademoiselle, can you trust me?" asked Maurice.

"Oh, yes, perfectly!" replied Pauline, earnestly.

"And will you promise to answer my questions, however strange they may appear?"

"Certainly," she said, her heart beating in sweet dread of what she believed Maurice was about to say, but she was mistaken, for, to her intense surprise, he continued:

"Do you love your father?"

Imagining that Maurice was preparing her for evil things, she stammered, pale with terror:

"My father is dead! I am sure of it! You were unable to save him and you feared to tell me!"

"No, Pauline, you are mistaken. If such a misfortune had happened I would not have had the cruelty to deceive you, and again, I repeat, your father is out of danger."

"But then why did you ask me that?" said Mlle. Brichet.

"In asking you to answer my questions I was careful to add: 'however strange they may appear,'" remarked Maurice.

"Of course I love my father," said Pauline; but she spoke with hesitation and as if speaking a lesson, and the doctor, looking at her steadily, detected the hesitation and read her thoughts.

"Yes," he said, "I am sure you are speaking truthfully, "but let us try together to find out why your answer was given so mechanically and with so little warmth."

"Ah, you know what I am thinking, then!" cried Pauline, much distressed.

"I read it in those sweet, clear eyes that can hide nothing. Yes, you love your father conscientiously, I know, but since his return you find him changed in a way you cannot account for, do you not?"

Pauline sat still, gazing at Maurice in frightened amazement.

"Yes, that is true," she murmured.

"Your feelings have changed toward him?" asked Maurice emphatically.

"Yes, and I am always telling myself that I am a wicked, ungrateful girl."

"Monsieur Brichet is always kind to you, is he not?"

"Oh, yes, he is just as good and kind as ever, but I don't know—there is something different even in the way he caresses me. When he passes his hand over my curls as he used to long ago, his hand seems so heavy, and when he kisses me—oh, I can't tell how it is, but he makes me shudder, and although his eyes are just the same, they seem to look at me in a strange way," and poor Pauline burst into tears. "Oh," she sobbed, "I am a wicked, unnatural girl, and repay all my father's fondness only with ingratitude." But all at once recovering her composure, she turned to Maurice and asked him suddenly: "But you, Maurice, why should you seek to draw from me this secret which I wished to keep buried in my own heart?"

Maurice shook his head sadly.

"Ah," he replied, "all I can tell you is this—that if I have asked you these painful questions, it is because I fear some misfortune threatens this house."

"A misfortune, do you say? But where could it come from? Whom could it threaten?"

Maurice was about to reply when a valet entered hastily.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "Monsieur Brichet is ask-

ing for you. He says that a kiss from mademoiselle will do him more good than any doctor."

"Dear father," sighed Pauline, deeply touched by this proof of Brichet's tenderness, coming as it did at the very moment she was accusing herself of loving him less warmly; and ashamed of having allowed Maurice to guess her secret, she fled toward her father's bedroom and disappeared from his sight.

"Now for t' other one," said the lackey, coolly, proceeding toward the garden.

"You are going to call Madame Brichet also?" asked the doctor, as he followed the man out on his way home.

"Yes, sir; my master said he wished to see around his bed all those he loves," replied the valet.

At this apparent proof of Brichet's affection for the two girls, Maurice paused, sorely troubled.

"What can I do?" he thought; and after some seconds of deep reflection he walked slowly to his own house.

From the window of Brichet's bedroom, M. de Badieres had watched the arrival of Mme. Brichet, as the servant preceded her to the hotel. The judge went to meet her, and said, as they entered the bedroom:

"Good news! We shall succeed in saving Raoul!"

On hearing this, poor Aurore, who seemed to drag her weary limbs with difficulty, was suddenly inspired with new life, a great joy lighting up her beautiful eyes, as she thanked the magistrate with a look.

"Yes," he continued, "we shall save him, but all must be over between you and M. de Cambriac. You will swear it, for the honor and peace of him who lies there?" pointing toward Brichet's bedroom.

"I am, and I always shall be, an honest woman!" replied Aurore, proudly entering her husband's room.

Rejoiced over his recovery, and chattering like a magpie, Brichet passed many happy hours, petted by his friends and caressed by his wife and daughter, and, full of repentance, made liberal promises of reform, and vowed he would drink no more.

"Yes, I dare say," thought Annibal.

"When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;
When the devil got well, the devil a monk was he."

For the captain knew full well the worth of a drunkard's promise. In the midst of the general contentment, the door opened, and Colard appeared, after six hours' repose. On seeing him, a slight grimace passed rapidly over Brichet's features, but recovering himself, he cried affectionately:

"Ah, my good Colard, is that you? Have you had a good sleep? You might have rested two or three hours more, for the time has passed very happily here. But why don't you come in, my good friend?" continued the *procureur*, seeing that the major-domo remained in the doorway.

"I have only come to take your orders as to a visitor who is here."

"If it is a friend with whom I need not be on ceremony, bring him in here," answered Brichet.

But Colard shook his head, and replied:

"No, sir; it is a lady, who has come in a splendid carriage."

"Every one looked surprised, lady visitors at the hotel being rare and generally announced by Colard without any preliminaries.

"A lady!" cried Brichet. "Did she give her name?"

"Yes, the Marquise de Brageron."

"Oh, ho! Some game of Master de Lozeril," thought

Annibal, on the *qui vive*, and Aurore, who also knew the name, trembled.

"Marquise de Brageron," repeated Brichet, seeking to recall some clue to the lady's antecedents.

"She says you do not know her, sir, but she has an important request to make to you."

"Mme. de Brageron is one of the greatest ladies of the court," said M. de Badieres to Brichet.

"And one of the richest," remarked the notary.

"And one of the wickedest," added Annibal, to himself.

Brichet turned toward his wife, saying:

"Well, Aurore, you are mistress of this house, and you must go and receive this lady. Make my excuses and tell her that only my illness prevents my waiting on her to know her commands."

Despite the terrible emotion that overcame her, by heroic efforts Aurore staggered to her feet, and, struggling with the sharp agony that gnawed her heart, left the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

Mme. de Brageron was standing at one of the windows overlooking the flower-garden. On seeing Aurore enter the *salon* and having expected to meet M. Brichet, the marquise could scarcely conceal her surprise. The young women reviewed each other in one rapid glance.

"She is dying of grief," thought the marquise, seeing the ravages in her rival's beauty since the day of the trial.

"This woman detests me," thought Aurore, noting the look of gratified malice in her visitor's face.

After exchanging a cold and formal bow, Aurore, trying in vain to steady her voice, opened the interview by saying :

"My husband is ill at present, and has begged me express to madame his sorrow at being unable to receive her. He has asked me to be his deputy, and to learn from you the nature of your business."

The marquise listened, gazing at Aurore with her cruel gray eyes :

"You may rest assured, madame, that whatever you

may have the goodness to confide to me will be faithfully transmitted to M. Brichet," Aurore continued, feigning not to observe the hostile inclination and curt mode of her visitor.

The marquise had laid all her plans on the certainty of an interview with Brichet, and the appearance of his wife in his stead had somewhat upset her calculations, but, resolving to risk the consequences, she announced boldly :

" I am commissioned by one of my friends to ask for the hand of Mlle. Pauline Brichet."

Aurore, as we have said, was too truly amiable to harbor any unfriendly feelings toward Pauline, but her position in the Hotel Brichet, where Pauline had formerly reigned supreme, and the necessity of sharing with Pauline authority over the household, made it extremely desirable that Pauline should be happily married, leaving Aurore in undisturbed possession of her rights. It was, therefore, almost with pleasure that she asked, in answer to Madame de Brageron's demand :

" Are you authorized, madame, to reveal the name of the person who has chosen you as his representative ?"

" It is the Chevalier de Lozeril," pronounced the marquise, slowly and distinctly, noting with watchful eyes the effect of her words.

On hearing the hateful name, every sentiment of honor and loyalty revolted within Aurore, and she exclaimed, unable to conceal her aversion :

" What ! *That man ?*"

Mme. Brichet's openly expressed contempt for the marquise's quondam lover did not tend to smooth that lady's ruffled plumes, but ignoring the insult, she retorted :

"And may I ask, madame, what there is about Monsieur de Lozeril that the very mention of his name should cause you to express so much antipathy ?"

Aurore raised her lovely eyes and looked steadily in the face of the marquise without answering. Her silence was another insult to Mme. de Brageron, who, pale with anger, continued, in a tone of suppressed rage :

"I have the honor of awaiting your reply."

"And if I hesitate to answer you, madame, it is that I am at a loss to imagine why you should think Mademoiselle Pauline Brichet had fallen so low as to accept for her husband the miserable wretch of whom you speak."

The marquise, with ill-concealed fury, answered :

"Is it not a sufficient refutation of all calumnies that I lend my name to the support of Monsieur de Lozeril's demand ?"

The repulsion Aurore felt for the woman's effrontery caused her to forget all prudence, and she replied scornfully :

"Indeed ! If Monsieur de Lozeril has been calumniated, he will not be much the better for being justified by you !"

"What do you mean ?" hissed out the marquise, madly irritated by this taunt.

Besides possessing a brave and loyal heart, Aurore knew that, in fighting Pauline's battles, she was defending a just cause, so nerving herself for the conflict, she replied bravely :

"I mean to say that Pauline is not so utterly abandoned by Providence that she should be obliged to accept for her husband the lover of a woman whom he has abandoned in disgust !"

Mme. de Brageron sprang to her feet, and advanc-

ing close to Aurore cried, in a voice hoarse with passion:

"Oh, indeed, my beauty! But it seems in this house the cast-off admirers of other women have not always been despised—"

But in the midst of her wild harangue the marquise stopped suddenly. The interruption was caused by the appearance of Annibal, who now advanced, and saluting the ladies, cried:

"Hush, hush! You will disturb the invalid. Your conversation must have been wonderfully interesting to make you forget your proximity to the sick-room. Am I indiscreet in asking permission to join you?" and so saying the captain drew forward an arm-chair and ensconced himself therein.

Annibal had been extremely anxious when Aurore left the room, and dreading the result of her interview with Mme. de Brageron, the noble warrior had judged it expedient to listen at the door, and matters speedily reaching a climax, he had thought it high time to interfere.

"There," he said, sitting down. "First, dear marquise, tell me how you have been all this long time. Dear me, what a long time it is! Not since poor De Brageron died. A jolly fellow he was! That is, except when he began to talk about you, for then the tears would come into his eyes, and he would curse the luck that had given him such a termagant of a wife! Oh, many a time he would cry bitterly—poor fellow—though he always ended with a roar of laughter, when I would say: 'I tell you what, De Brageron, if I had a wife like yours, I would take her very delicately by the neck and just give it one little twist to try whether a purple tint was becoming to her style of beauty,'" and Annibal, though he smiled and seemed

delightfully good-natured, accompanied his reminiscences with a sinister movement of his fingers so extremely like throttling that the marquise could not repress a shudder, as if she felt the giant's massive hand already on her slender throat. "Not that I am cruel to ladies," continued Annibal, "far from it. I love them. Ah, that is just my weakness! But I become a little dangerous when I find the pretty creatures plotting against me or against mine."

There was no mistaking the manner in which the captain pronounced these last three words. The marquise, understanding the hint, said to herself:

"I defy the brute!"

Annibal proceeded:

"But I am chattering like a magpie about the good times that are past and forgetting the present. Come, tell me what you were discussing with so much animation, for I can assure you, you *were* animated, especially the marquise, who seemed to be personating some one in a rage."

Mme. de Brageron was no coward, and disregarding the covert menaces of Annibal, she replied at once:

"I came here in the name of Monsieur de Lozeril to ask for the hand of Mademoiselle Pauline Brichet."

Annibal laughed aloud as he remarked:

"Well, to be sure, how one misjudges people! I always thought De Lozeril an unmitigated blackguard, but I never before thought him an utter idiot."

The marquise stared at the captain in amazement.

"Yes, an idiot," he continued calmly. "What! He—a gambler, a cutthroat, a dissipated ruffian, I might even say a swindler, comes here actually to court a refusal! Yes, he did well to charge you with his beautiful commission, for if he had come himself Brichet would have kicked him out of the door, having

always adhered firmly to his intention of giving his daughter to an honest man!" and turning toward Aurore, Annibal continued in a tone of amiable reproof: "How is it, little girl, that you failed to convince the marquise how uselessly she has troubled herself on account of that blackguard? You ought to have made her understand adroitly and without wounding her susceptibilities, you know. Just as I have done."

Mme. de Brageron understood perfectly well the sarcasms of the captain, though she pretended to ignore his meaning and answered quietly:

"Madame Brichet is of quite the same opinion as you!"

"And you still persist in your demand?"

"Yes, and I wish it to be carried to Monsieur Brichet."

Then in his most courtly manner Annibal replied:

"Very good. Stay here in the *salon* and you shall have the satisfaction of hearing an honest man's refusal of the scoundrel you propose to him for a son-in-law, only I must beg you to excuse my returning and accompanying you down-stairs. Now listen and you will not lose a word."

So saying the captain offered his arm to his daughter, and they left the *salon* and passed into Brichet's bedroom, leaving the door open between the rooms. The marquise heard the voice of Brichet inquiring:

"Well, what did Madame de Brageron want?"

The captain, prefacing his reply with one of his great roars of laughter, exclaimed:

"Oh, an excellent joke! She actually came to ask the hand of Pauline for a good-for-nothing friend of hers named De Lozeril."

"Lozeril? Lozeril?" replied Brichet. "Isn't that

the name of the young man who declared he had seen me half murdered ?"

"Just so."

A silence ensued, and then, as if on reflection, Brichet continued :

"And what did you say ?"

"That she had doubtless mistaken the house," answered Annibal, airily.

"You did wrong, my friend, and I shall write to the marquise and ask her to do me the honor of introducing her *protégé*."

"Are you mad, Brichet ?" cried M. de Badieres, sternly. "The captain is quite right. This Lozeril is an utter scamp !"

"An unmitigated scoundrel," added the notary.

"Oh, I dare say !" said Brichet, indulgently ; "but you know these rakish fellows always make the best husbands."

Impossible to describe the general stupefaction at hearing Brichet thus express himself. This man, so upright, so moral, so rigid in his principles, a most devoted father and a shrewd man of business, announcing his intention of trusting his daughter, and with her a portion of his immense fortune, to a man sunk in depravity, seemed so monstrous that the judge and the notary could not believe their senses. They returned to the charge, but without in any degree moving Brichet, who replied, laughing :

"Let me alone, all of you. I see what you are after. Each of you would like me to give my daughter to a man of your choosing. You, De Badieres, would have her married to one of your brother judges, as grave and rigid as Justice herself ; and you, Blaudoin, would have me give her to some young notary, a wretched book-worm, feeding on nasty old law papers—yes, I

know the sort! I 've lived among them long enough, dull as their books. I want a change now! It is time this old hotel brightened up a bit with life and gayety, and a son-in-law who knows how to amuse himself would know how to amuse me!"

"M. de Lozeril has done worse things than amusing himself," remarked the judge, dryly.

"Oh, I dare say! Some follies of youth that seem dreadful enormities to you sober men of the law!"

"But he is over head and ears in debt," cried the notary, aghast.

"Well, we can pay his debts."

"And an incorrigible gambler, who will scatter your fortune on the table of every gaming-house in the town!"

"All right, that is my affair," retorted the *procureur*, and he added, sharply: "And, after all, I would just as soon see my fortune squandered on the gaming-table as to have it locked up in a notary's office so preciously tight that I can't get a few crowns after asking twenty times."

The poor notary was deeply wounded by this speech of Brichet's, his motive for having refused him the three millions demanded having been one of disinterested friendship, believing as he did that the *procureur* required the money to defray the expenses of another wild fit of roaming; but Brichet's taunt making further hesitation impossible, he answered very curtly:

"Very good, Brichet, to-morrow I shall bring you the three millions."

At these words the very slightest suspicion of a smile hovered for a moment on Brichet's lips and involuntarily his eyes sought Colard, who was sitting in a distant corner, listening. Of all the witnesses of this scene, none was so petrified with amazement as the

captain, who had anticipated with certainty the *procureur's* disdainful refusal of De Lozeril, and the consequent humiliation of Mme. de Brageron ; but here was Brichet accepting with the greatest eagerness, this wretched De Lozeril, of whom he knew nothing, save that the man was a scoundrel of the worst description. But another thought recalled the captain to himself.

"Three millions ! Ah, if Brichet were only a gambler, what a pretty lump of that nugget I might get !"

And with his regrets, the captain sadly reflected that he should have but small chance of even being alone with the *procureur* when once De Lozeril should arrive. This reminded him that the marquise, whom he had totally forgotten in his stupefaction of Brichet's behavior, was still listening in the *salon*.

"By Jove !" he thought. "If this cursed woman has heard them speaking of three millions, she 'll be off to Master de Lozeril with the news !"

And gliding by degrees toward the bedroom door, the captain slipped out and found himself in the *salon*. The marquise was still there ; she had heard all, and the mocking smile of triumph with which she greeted Annibal raised his anger to a white heat, twenty times more terrible than the most violent outburst would have been. Bending down toward her until his face almost touched hers, and laying his heavy hand on her shoulder, he hissed fiercely in her ear :

"Look here, woman ; if you persist in your project of bringing De Lozeril here, I 'll crush you both under my heel like the two worms that you are."

The marquise looked steadily in her enemy's face and smiled triumphantly ; then somewhat raising her voice, said, in clear and ringing accents :

"Thanks, my dear captain, but don't trouble your-

self to repeat the satisfactory answer I have heard from Monsieur Brichet's own lips. Thank him for me, convey to him my sincere regrets at his illness, and tell him that Monsieur de Lozeril will call upon him to-morrow to express for himself his deepest gratitude."

This said, she went her way, leaving the captain dumfounded at such audacity.

The judge and the notary both hurried into the *salon*, but the lady had disappeared.

"Why couldn't you have told us the marquise was here?" asked the notary, reproachfully, who feared to offend so rich a client by his candid judgment of her *protégé*.

"Yes, I was wrong, I admit," replied Annibal. "But, really, I was so floored by Brichet's crazy behavior, that I forgot all about her."

On returning to the sick-room, the three gentlemen encountered Pauline leaving it, followed by Colard. The poor girl was much agitated, and weeping bitterly. Never having seen De Lozeril, excepting on the day of his now famous recital, she was at first simply surprised at his demanding her hand, then on her father so readily giving his consent, and the consequent indignation of his two old friends and their efforts to battle with his fatal obstinacy, she had divined that it was a question entailing the happiness of her whole future life, and she felt the utmost terror and misery at her father's willingness to hand her over to such a scoundrel. In the midst of her distress the thought of Maurice came to her, calling forth a flood of tears, and an immense sorrow filled her heart, hitherto so perfectly free from care. Instinctively in the hour of peril the poor girl turned toward her faithful Colard, who now, indeed, seemed her only friend.

"I am frightened ; take me away, dear old Colard," she murmured in a broken voice.

The old servant had witnessed the strange scene with emotion too deep for words. On listening to the *procureur's* extraordinary sentiments Colard slowly rose from his seat and stood there in the corner, an image of silent wrath, his teeth set, his hands clenched and darting the most terrible looks of menace toward his master, who studiously avoided meeting his indignant eyes. At the plaintive appeal of his beloved mistress the old man trembled with agitation, and as if to protect the poor child, who seemed to cling to him, inclosed her in his sheltering arms, while there broke from his faithful breast a hoarse cry, so full of fury and angry menace, that Brichet, though pretending to ignore Colard's demonstration, became deadly pale.

In great haste he ordered Colard to go.

"Yes, let us go !" growled the latter, almost carrying Pauline toward the door, and he conducted his young mistress to her room and there for an hour poured forth all the affection of his devoted heart in trying to console her.

"No, no, my beloved mistress," he said, "this cursed marriage shall never be. Trust poor old Colard," he repeated again and again, with an energy and assurance that belied his streaming eyes.

In the midst of her despair a thought came to Pauline's mind, and she sobbed out :

"Monsieur Maurice was right. Only two hours ago he told me some misfortune threatened this house."

At the doctor's name the attendant dried his eyes, and smiling, murmured :

"Ah, I had forgotten him ! That good, dear

Maurice! I must go and speak to him!" So saying he descended the stairs, and while crossing the garden reflected: "These two young people love each other; here is the marriage that would insure Pauline's happiness, and this marriage shall be, despite all the De Lozerils in the world. *I will have it and it shall be!*"

The doctor's old servant opened the door.

"I must speak to Monsieur Gardi," said Colard, entering.

"He is out," replied the woman.

"Then I shall wait until he comes in. Has he gone to see a patient?"

"I doubt it, M. Colard; for my master, on coming from the Hotel Brichet, packed a little valise in great haste, borrowed a neighbor's horse and went off, telling me he would not be back to-night."

"And you don't know where he has gone."

"No; but he seemed very grave and absent.'

Colard slowly retraced his footsteps, wondering where the doctor could have gone.

"I suppose he has gone to the country to visit some important patient," he continued.

On reaching the grand entrance he met the judge and the notary, who had taken leave of Brichet, finding all their efforts to reason him out of his extraordinary whim were vain.

"Perhaps we are making too much of it, and by to-morrow he will probably have given up all thoughts of this scandalous marriage," said M. de Badieres to the notary.

To these two faithful friends of the house Colard felt himself at liberty to speak, and he sadly remarked:

"No, sir, don't think of it. To-morrow my

master will not have renounced his disgraceful scheme."

"But what can be his motive in persisting in such insanity?" cried the notary.

The old servant looked steadily at M. de Badieres, and, compressing his lips, significantly tapped his forehead with his forefinger:

"I very much fear that the fit of apoplexy has affected his brain."

"Good God!" cried the two friends in a breath. "Do you think he is going mad?"

"Alas!" answered Colard, sadly.

"No, no. I don't think it is so bad as that, and I believe to-morrow we shall hear no more of this marriage," said the judge, repudiating the idea of Brichet's insanity.

But the morrow proved that Colard was right, for De Lozeril received the freedom of the Hotel Brichet and became, with Annibal, the inseparable companion of the *procureur*, so that the good attendant could scarcely get a word with his master. At the same time, the news of Brichet's illness, coupled with that of the extraordinary marriage in contemplation for Pauline, brought a host of curious visitors to the hotel. With the greater number, all friends of some twenty years' standing, Brichet made such egregious blunders, and showed such terrible lapses of memory and confusion of dates, names and events even of recent times, that each one on leaving the hotel could not but remark:

"Brichet is certainly demented since his fit!"

On the third day the *procureur*, having left his bed, tore himself for a moment from the society of Annibal and De Lozeril, and going straight to Colard, who was engaged about the room, he whispered quickly:

"Do you intend to leave me much longer to pass for a lunatic?"

"Do what I have asked you in vain at least twenty times and then you may count on me!"

"Never!" replied Brichet. "It is my only security."

"I will make you do it some time, by hook or by crook," responded Colard, calmly, "by fair means or foul."

CHAPTER XX.

The report of Brichet's insanity spread with amazing rapidity, and what gave it the strongest coloring of truth was his very eccentric conduct with regard to the projected marriage. After having accepted the chevalier's proposal with such ready eagerness, he seemed suddenly to forget all about it, and excepting that De Lozeril was now initiated as an inmate of the hotel, no one now but the chevalier himself gave the marriage one serious thought. His efforts having been so far crowned with the most unlooked-for success, De Lozeril naturally imagined that all he now had to do was to "go in and win," and he saw the millions of Pauline's *dot* already within his grasp; but events were taking so strange a turn that he presently began to ask himself whether he was not the victim of some conspiracy, or whether in truth Brichet was really mad.

When De Lozeril first presented himself at the hotel, the *procureur* received him most warmly and insisted on installing him in a magnificent chamber, himself seeing to every detail for his guest's comfort, but since then not one word had he breathed as to the projected marriage, and each time De Lozeril at-

tempted to broach the subject, Brichet would say with a shrug :

"You seem to be in a great hurry to put the cord round your neck."

"No, no, but I should like to have some time fixed."

"My time shall be yours, my dear fellow—when you have agreed on it with Pauline. Try then to have her hasten the day. I am as anxious for it as you," replied the *procureur*.

But this was more easily said than done. Pauline obstinately refused to leave her apartments, and all the efforts of the chevalier to pay her a visit were met by the same response :

"Mademoiselle does not receive."

De Lozeril thought it high time to complain to Brichet of his *fiancée* for thus remaining invisible, but her father answered quietly :

"Oh, give her time to reconcile herself to the charming idea of being your wife ; she is a little timid, but she will come round."

But at the end of a fortnight Pauline was as obdurate as ever, and De Lozeril, furious, exclaimed :

"It seems as if every one was in league to make a fool of me in this house."

For even Annibal himself had failed to support him, telling him very plainly on his arrival in the hotel :

"My good De Lozeril, you have got yourself in here quite against my wish and contrary to my interest. So long as it is merely a question of eating and drinking, and amusing yourself at Brichet's expense, I shall say nothing ; but as your projected marriage would encroach on a considerable corner of the cake that I desire to keep for my daughter, I warn you that if you think of taking the thing seriously I shall cure you radically of your matrimonial ideas." And the captain

had repeated, emphasizing every syllable, "ra-di-cal-ly, do you understand? With this proviso, you and I can live as comfortably here as two mice in a cheese."

In addition to the wish not to appear intimidated by Annibal's threat, the chevalier had another cogent reason for remaining in the hotel. For on the morning following his arrival he had seen the notary entering Brichet's room, carrying a huge pocket-book, which seemed bursting with money. Heavenly visions dazzled the brain of the rapacious wooer. Yes, it was, it must be, the precious millions of his lady-love! The millions of whose advent the marquise had apprised him. But, unfortunately, he was not the only one in the hotel who had watched and waited for the golden cargo, for Annibal, too, had been on guard in the vestibule, and now lay in wait in the street to buttonhole the notary on his departure.

"Ah! Is that you, M. Bandinau?" cried the ingenuous warrior, joining the notary as if by accident. "Have you been to see Brichet?"

"Yes. I have just left the hotel."

"I trust you have not had the imprudence to fulfill the rash promise you made yesterday!"

"Excuse, me, captain, but I have just given the money into his hand."

Annibal affected the deepest despair, as he cried, sadly:

"What, unhappy man! Have you actually committed the folly of confiding such a sum of money to a lunatic?"

"Brichet seemed yesterday to doubt my honesty, and for nothing in existence would I allow my good name to remain under such a stigma," returned the notary, peremptorily.

"But, my too susceptible friend, you know Brichet

is an irascible person, who speaks without reflection, and I am certain he must have forgotten to-day all he said yesterday," replied the crafty Annibal.

"Ah, you think that, do you?" returned the notary, dryly. "Well, my dear captain, allow me to tell you that your son-in-law, far from forgetting his insult of yesterday, repeated it to-day in so offensive a manner that I have no alternative but to wash my hands of his affairs altogether. I am now returning to my office as quickly as possible to realize af once the rest of his fortune. In two days," cried M. Bandinau, with great wrath, "he will have it all in his own possession."

"What, all?" cried Annibal, aghast.

"Yes, his seven millions."

"But what do you think he will do with it, cracked as he is?"

"Do with it? Whatever he likes. Make ducks and drakes of it, what do I care! Or he can hand it over to the first swindler he meets, as all the bonds are to be made 'payable to bearer,' so that they can be transferred from hand to hand like hard cash, without any formality!" said the angry lawyer.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the giant, seriously troubled, thinking how easily the greedy De Lozeril might now help himself to the spoil; and, leaving the notary, Annibal returned hastily to the hotel. His reflections kept pace with his rapid progress, and wondering to himself how Brichet could be such a fool as to sleep with seven millions under his pillow, a thought suddenly flashed across him.

"I see it all!" he cried. "It is not Brichet who is the idiot, it is De Lozeril and I who are a couple of asses! It is evident that Brichet has concocted this scheme of Pauline's pretended marriage to put us off the scent; he is raising this money under the plea of

its being for her *dot*, and some fine morning my gentleman will give us all the slip, leaving us here beggars—wife, daughter, father-in-law and son-in-law." And the captain, certain that he had discovered the secret, hastened on, saying: "I must look after the booty."

On arriving at the hotel, he found Brichet endeavoring to pacify De Lozeril, who was much provoked at the indefinite prospect of his marriage.

"But why should you complain, chevalier?" reasoned the *procureur*. "Are you not comfortable and happy in my house? Pauline will probably make up her mind before long, and now it only depends upon her; you see there is the *dot* all ready!"

"Cunning old thief? I see your game!" thought the captain, who entered just in time to hear these words.

During the ensuing fifteen days, Brichet's mode of living completely changed. Not a step did he take, in the house or out of it, without finding the captain and the chevalier at his heels, and far from being displeased at this surveillance, the *procureur* seemed delighted. On the morning of the sixteenth day, however, De Lozeril was not at his post. He had gone to consult his ally, Mme. de Brageron, whom he had not seen since she had called on him at the doctor's house and brought him Brichet's acceptance of his suit.

The marquise awaited the marriage as impatiently as De Lozeril, knowing that by this means the doors of the hotel would henceforth be open to her.

"Well, are you to be married at last?" she asked, rather crossly.

The young man shook his head despondently, and replied;

"Marquise, I really believe that you and I have been the victims of some deception."

And he told her all that had passed during the last fortnight: the obstinate refusal of Pauline to see him, Brichet's adherence to his *rôle* of neutrality and seeming unwillingness to assert his parental authority. The chevalier ended his recital by saying:

"From the easy manner in which I was accepted, I should have known there was something in the wind; and now I believe I have been taken into the house to play another part instead of son-in-law."

"What part?" asked the lady.

"A body-guard."

Mme. de Brageron stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, I mean what I say—a body-guard. I don't know what the mischief the old fellow is afraid of, but the very day after I arrived he takes me up in a corner and says to me: 'Whatever you do, for God's sake don't leave me alone with Fouquier and Colard.'"

The marquise reflected.

"Doubtless he wishes to spare himself the importunities of two men who are hostile to your marriage," she said.

"Yes, marquise, that's what I thought at first, but yesterday, when in the garden, I overheard Brichet saying to the captain: 'Above all things never leave me alone with Colard and De Lozeril!' and then I saw why it was that whenever I was with the *procureur* Annibal was certain to be at my heels, for the same order had been given to both of us. Now, what danger does he possibly fear from either the one or the other?"

"You are mistaken," replied the marquise, who had listened with care. "It is neither of you he fears—it is Colard. Why, I do not know, but that you must

find out. The old *procureur* has adroitly deceived you both, making you two act as his body-guard in order to protect himself from Colard, for you see his name is repeated in each separate injunction."

"What should I do?" asked De Lozeril.

"Try and get round Colard; worm out of him the secret of Brichet's fear of him and then turn it to your own account," and she dismissed the young man.

De Lozeril wended his way slowly back to the hotel, reflecting deeply on the secret of Colard's great influence over Brichet and his money. The one absorbing thought of this needy adventurer was Pauline's millions. At times, irritated by the apparent futility of his project, he felt inclined to renounce his pretensions. Then Brichet would spur him on to renewed activity. And now the marquise added her adjuration.

By the time the chevalier reached the hotel he had conceived a new plan. He went straightway to Pauline's apartments, assured the door would be opened by Colard. He was right. The attendant appeared and gave him the invariable answer:

"Mademoiselle does not receive."

"The good news I bring should induce mademoiselle to change her mind," remonstrated De Lozeril, counting on at least being asked what this news might be; but the old man remained silent, and bowing, was about to shut the door, when De Lozeril, laying his hand on Colard's arm, said quickly: "Are you not curious, my good man?"

"My duty is to restrain my curiosity," was the reply.

"Very well, Colard, as I am not to see your mistress, I beg you to carry her my farewell, and to say that I renounce all pretensions to her hand."

"Mademoiselle will be very happy," said Colard, with more truth than politeness.

"Upon my word," said De Lozeril, smiling, "you are not very flattering. You could scarcely say in plainer words that Mademoiselle detests me."

The attendant shook his head.

"No, no, sir," he said. "I don't mean that; but if my mistress has so often declined seeing you, it has been in your interest."

"Indeed!" cried Lozeril, mystified by this reply.

"I assure you that mademoiselle has thus acted, fearing lest you might a second time be the victim of a violent attack, like the one from which you escaped. Mademoiselle Pauline has the greatest terror of the captain, sir."

"Oh, bless you! Annibal is not quite so alarming as all that!" said the chevalier, disdainfully.

"Mademoiselle would rather see herself despoiled of every crown her father possesses than that any one should be exposed to the violence of that ruffian, who is determined to secure for himself my poor master's fortune."

"Yes, that is true. Annibal came to me full of threats, declaring he would defend this fortune against all comers."

"Then, you see, sir, that my young lady is right in trembling for your safety," answered Colard, adding, with a great sigh of contentment: "Happily, she will now have no further apprehension, as you have prudently resolved to retire."

The allusion to his "prudence" wounded the young man's susceptibilities. Besides, he had never had the slightest intention of retiring from the field, and had merely announced his departure to Colard with a view to securing some information for his future guidance.

He therefore announced his intention to remain, in the hope of being of some use to Mlle. Pauline. A faint smile flickered on Colard's face, but it vanished before De Lozeril saw it.

"Ah, sir," he replied, in a grief-stricken voice, "my good master, since his illness, has completely lost his head; he has no memory whatever, and makes the most lamentable mistakes. The captain has absolute control over him, and sets him against every one; you, sir, and *me*—*me*, his own old Colard! He makes him do just what he likes, and some fine day he will put out his big hand and grab everything—"

"Beginning with the three millions for the *dot* that Brichet now carries about with him in a pocket-book," interrupted De Lozeril, hastily.

"Oh, sir, you are mistaken as to the amount."

"Three millions, I tell you; I know it," repeated the young man, thinking Colard wished to diminish the importance of the amount.

"All the same, sir, you are mistaken. It is seven millions."

"Seven millions!" gasped the chevalier.

The faint smile again showed itself on Colard's pale lips.

"Yes," he continued, "seven millions. The notary has returned all of my master's money intrusted to him. All the bonds are payable to bearer, and though the captain dares not seize them here, he knows my poor master's mania for roaming, and he will excite and encourage his propensity until he gets him away from us all, and then Heaven help him! The poor old lunatic, the captain will rob him of his last crown," and Colard, hiding his face in his hands, burst into tears.

"Oh, will he, though!" thought De Lozeril. "I

know a trick worth two of that," but laying his hand affectionately on the old man's arm, he said :

"Come, don't frighten yourself, Colard. I will look after Annibal."

"What, sir, you will have the courage to defy this savage beast?" cried Colard with grateful admiration.

"Yes, I shall stay here, and you may tell Mademoiselle Pauline that my only motive in remaining is to prevent her ruin."

"Oh, chevalier, believe me she will end by loving the man who shows such devotion."

"I trust so, Colard, but I shall wait without even asking or expecting anything," sighed De Lozeril with well-feigned emotion.

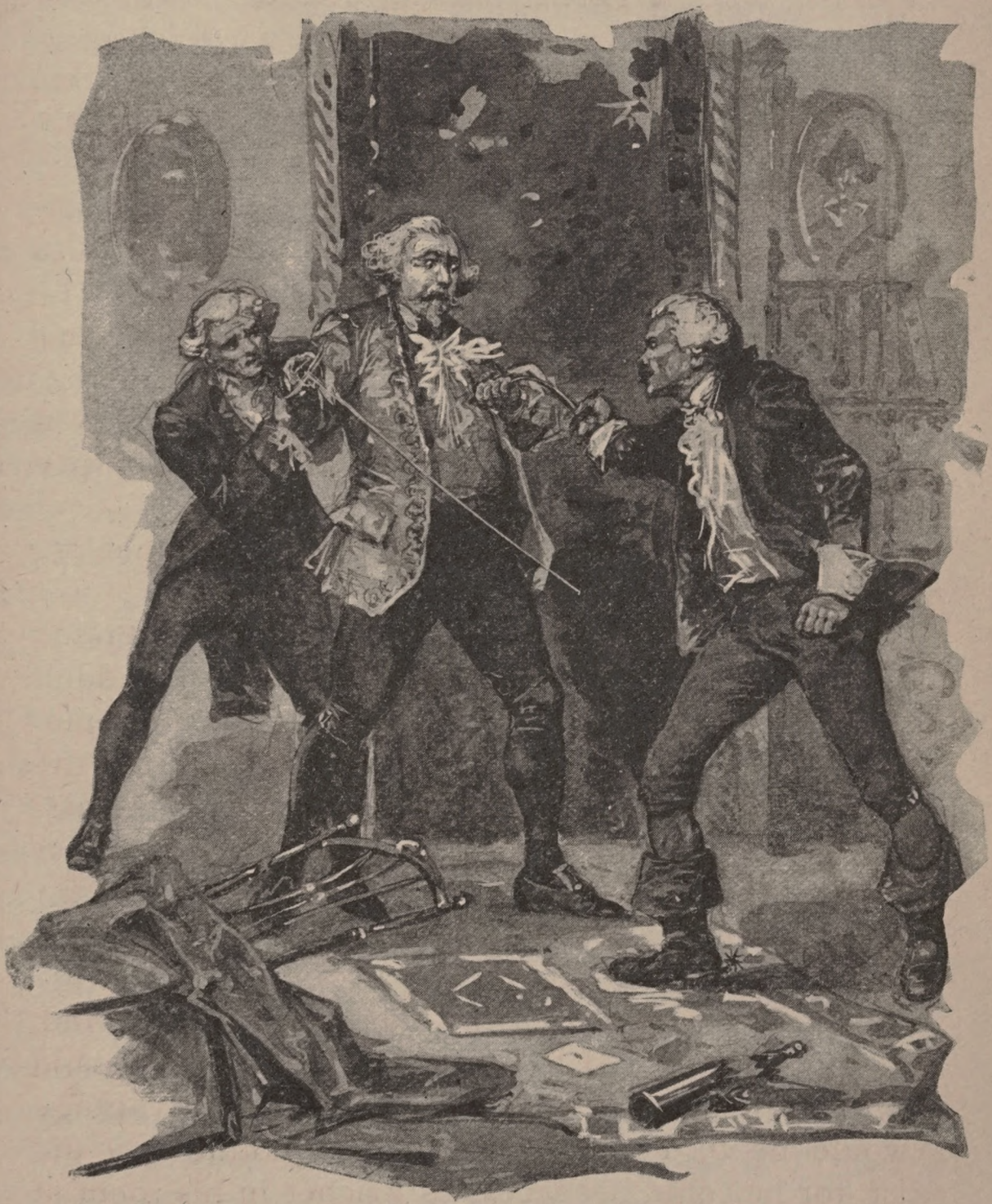
"Then from this day, sir, you will take care that my master is not carried away from us?"

"Yes, I shall watch over him day and night," replied the young man, but at the word 'night' a sudden thought struck him. "Ah, by the way, tell me something, Colard. Between Brichet's apartment on the first floor and Fouquier's on the second, is there not some sort of communication—a masked door—a secret staircase?"

"I don't know," replied the attendant, repressing a tremor.

"The captain once told me something of the kind, but he never referred to the matter again. I should like to know, for you see what an immense advantage it would be to Fouquier if this communication did exist, for he could get access to Brichet in his room at any hour of the night, while I would be breaking my nose against the door which had been carefully locked on the inside."

"I know of no secret communication," repeated



THE CHEVALIER'S STEEL WAS BURIED IN HIS BREAST.—*See Page* 281

Colard, never for a moment flinching under the keen scrutiny of the chevalier.

"And as I have said," continued the latter, "the outside door of Brichet's apartments is guarded by bolts, is it not?"

"Yes—but—" said the old man, hesitating.

"But what?"

"There are no bolts on the captain's door, sir, only a key."

"How could that help me, good man?"

"In this way, sir; that if there is a secret communication between the two stories, and you could not get into M. Brichet's room by the door, you could enter through the captain's room by getting down the secret stair, and I have the key of Annibal's room."

"Very good, then I count on you. Now, tell me where is Brichet at this moment?"

"I believe he is in the pavilion with madame."

"The captain is not with them?"

"Oh, no, sir; he does not distrust his daughter."

"Very well. Now I shall go and wait till Brichet leaves the pavilion, and you may be sure that if the captain thinks of enticing Brichet away to get hold of his money he won't take him very far!"

"Oh, chevalier, how grateful Mademoiselle Pauline will be!" cried the old servant, with emotion, as he opened the door to De Lozeril, who, on descending to the garden, said to himself:

"He can keep his Mademoiselle Pauline if I can only get possession of the seven millions!"

Colard followed him with his eyes as he walked up and down before the pavilion, and murmuring:

"Now for the other one," ascended to the second floor and entered the captain's room.

"What do you want, idiot?" he cried, on Colard's entrance.

"The captain seems to forget that this is the last day of the month—pay-day," replied Colard, gently laying two heaps of louis on the table.

"Then you are welcome, knave, although you ought to understand that the last of the month should come every fifteen days," said Annibal, mollified.

"You must impress that on M. Brichet. Now that he has taken the management of his own affairs he will probably pay your pension himself, or perhaps get his son-in-law to do it."

"His son-in-law! What do you mean, donkey?" asked Annibal, surprised.

"Is it not true that M. de Lozeril will soon—"

The captain threw himself back in his chair and shrieked with laughter.

"Oh, you most egregious old idiot, and so you actually believed that little joke, did you?" he cried.

"Monsieur de Lozeril believes it," affirmed Colard, seriously.

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, he has just been asking me all about Monsieur Brichet's fortune, and I told him about the seven million he carries about in his pocketbook."

"You told him that, you cursed old fool! What for, you idiot?"

"Well, it was when Monsieur de Lozeril was speaking of those investments he is going to make in foreign parts," replied Colard, meekly.

"In foreign parts, do you say?"

"Yes, it seems to me that he wants to get away soon, although he said nothing positively; but I think he imagines a voyage would be good for the sick brain of his father-in-law."

"You be cursed with your 'father-in-law,' indeed! Get out of this, you imbecile! Be off! Make yourself scarce!" roared the captain.

Colard did not require a second bidding, but humbly retired. Descending the staircase, he stopped at a window and watched Brichet emerging from his wife's pavilion. He looked long and darkly at his master, murmuring the while:

"Now you may escape from me if you can, but I have let loose two bloodhounds on your track, who will very soon stop your running."

After Colard's double confidence to De Lozeril and the captain, life resumed its apparently tranquil monotony in the Hotel Brichet. So long as the question of matrimony was not brought forward Annibal overwhelmed the chevalier with sweet words, while De Lozeril was equally amiable toward the giant; but underneath the velvet paw of courtesy lay hidden a terrible claw ready to tear and rend whenever occasion should offer. The *procureur* resumed his former routine and simple habits despite the blandishments of the captain, who sorely tempted him to break his vow of abstinence.

Annibal was irritated by his father-in-law's obstinate sobriety, while De Lozeril, watching intently every move of Annibal, would say to himself:

"Yes, I see your game. You want to make the old fellow drunk, that you may get him to talk, but if he does tell you anything, be sure I will be there to listen."

Each of the rivals was intent on finding out where Brichet had deposited his treasure, and what disposition he would make of the immense sum now lying idle in his hands. Each had done his utmost to extract the truth from the old man, but in this respect Brichet

showed himself wide awake and even strategic, for he had once replied :

" What, you really didn't think that the notary would bear me malice for a few words said in haste. I confess it was with difficulty I persuaded him to take back the money ; but it was too great an anxiety to me. I even returned Pauline's *dot*, for it seems there is no hurry for it."

This cunning reply failed, however, to convince either Annibal or the chevalier, for each knew full well that the offended notary had never set foot within the hotel, and further, that Brichet had never crossed its threshold ; consequently, the money was still in his possession. M. de Badieres had returned once or twice to see his old friend, but being annoyed at the continued presence of De Lozeril, his visits were cold and formal, and chiefly devoted to Aurore.

Thus the old man was the exclusive property of the two rivals, who tracked his footsteps the whole day and conducted him to his apartments at night. Then the two scoundrels would bid one another an affectionate good night.

About a week after the double confidence of Colard, which naturally had more than ever put the rivals on the alert, Brichet seemed to begin to weary of the constant surveillance of his body-guard, and, although he could not justly complain of too much zeal in their compliance with his own request, appeared desirous that their vigilance might be somewhat relaxed. And so, one morning at breakfast, a meal at which the ladies never appeared, the *procureur* said to Annibal, in a tone of kind solicitude :

" Do you know, my dear captain, my conscience has been reproaching me on your account."

" How so, beloved son-in-law ?"

"Well, my illness has made me selfish; and I have cut you off from all your friends, with whom you used to be so gay."

"That is true," replied Annibal, strangling a sigh at the recollection of by-gone orgies.

"But, although the doctor has ordered me to live the life of a hermit, there is no reason why you should do likewise; so now you must go back to your friends and enjoy yourself while you have health and capacity for enjoyment—to please me, my good Annibal."

The old thief wants to be off!" thought the captain, in no way deceived by Brichet's pretended generosity, but with a charming imitation of simplicity and candor he replied:

"Brichet, shall I tell you the truth?"

"Speak," said Brichet.

"Well, I swear to you on my honor that, since you have taught me to appreciate the simple pleasures of home life, I care no more for all the dissipation I formerly indulged in," and the worthy Annibal threw himself back in his chair, and, with eyes half closed, looking the very picture of virtuous contentment, he uttered the following noble sentiment: "Happy and wise is he, who, knowing how to appreciate the good things he holds in his hand, disdains the pursuit of vain and empty pleasures."

The sudden conversion of his father-in-law amazed Brichet, and looking keenly at the giant, after a moment's reflection, he again returned to the charge.

"Yes," said he, "a man is certainly a fool who runs after pleasure, when he can call pleasure to him."

"What is he driving at now?" thought the captain, surprised in his turn.

Brichet continued, indulgently:

"Since your affection for me, a poor sick man, keeps

you at my side and prevents your going into the town and enjoying yourself, why not invite some of your kind friends to come and see you here ?"

The captain, almost dumb with astonishment, managed, however, to gasp out :

" But you showed my kind friends the door !"

" Ah, but I had not then learned to be fond of you," said the repentant Brichet.

" And you complained of the noise they made over your head, although you were then in good health ; how could you like it now ?" said Annibal, emphatically.

" After all your attention to me in my sickness, the thought that you are enjoying yourself would now make me deaf to any slight noise there might be," replied Brichet, gently.

All this sudden indulgence had only the effect of doubling the captain's suspicions. His eyes, at that moment, falling on De Lozeril, who sat listening in silence, the captain speculated thus :

" By Jove, I have it ! While I am carousing, he and the chevalier will be off, the devil knows where ; then farewell to the old man and his nugget !"

In truth, however, De Lozeril was quite as much mystified as the captain, and he, on his side, surmised :

" These two have cunningly arranged this little plan between them to mask their flight. They will get Annibal's friends here to make an infernal row and, imagining that I will believe Brichet to be in bed and the captain at table, the two will be off, and then good-by to Brichet and his millions !"

But at the moment when each of the rogues had thus arrived at his own conclusion, Brichet utterly demolished all theories by remarking, calmly :

" I hope, Annibal, that you will invite De Lozeril. It will, so to speak, be his adieu to his bachelor life."

Annibal and the chevalier stared before them in open-mouthed astonishment, the one thinking :

" If De Lozeril really comes to my table, he cannot be intending to make away with Brichet."

And the other :

" If Fouquier includes me among his guests he cannot think of eluding me and going of with the old man."

Brichet, intent on his breakfast, saw nothing of his auditors' discomfiture. At length he raised his head and asked :

" Is it agreed ? Is the chevalier to be invited to your little carouse ?"

" Such an agreeable guest will indeed be welcome !" replied the captain, hastily, delighted at the idea of keeping De Lozeril under his eye during the evening.

" And you, De Lozeril ?" asked the *procureur* of the young man, who hesitated to answer, but, at this moment, his eye meeting that of Colard, who stood at his usual place, mute and passive, behind his master's chair, it appeared to him that the attendant made a slight affirmative sign, and so he replied :

"So amiable a host as the captain would easily induce one to accept his invitation, and I do so, with pleasure."

Brichet's glass was raised to his lips, and if the two rivals had not been engaged in looking defiance at each other across the table, they might have observed that the hand which held the glass trembled as the second " body-guard " gave his consent.

That same evening, in consequence of the above conversation, the table was sumptuously laid in Annibal's apartment, surrounded by the " kind friends," who had hastened eagerly to obey his summons. Previous to taking their place at the supper table, the two men

had, as usual, accompanied Brichet to the door of his bedroom, where, wishing them good night, he added :

"Enjoy yourselves, my friends, to your heart's content. The pleasure of knowing that you are happy is enough for me, and I shall soon be sent to sleep by the clinking of your glasses."

So saying, the *procureur* waved his hand gayly and passed into his room, the grating of the lock and the drawing of the bolts announcing that he had locked himself in for the night.

CHAPTER XXI.

The reader must now return to Doctor Gardi. It will be remembered that, after the night at Brichet's bedside, the doctor had returned home, sad and pensive, and that when, two hours later, Colard presented himself at his door, he was told by the doctor's servant that her master had gone into the country. His absence was but short, for the following morning the servant heard him singing merrily at his toilet. His present gayety contrasted so agreeably with his previous sadness, that the old servant, who adored him, could not help observing the transition, and remarked :

" You seem to have had a pleasant journey, sir."

" A capital journey, Germaine," cried the young man, rubbing his hands.

" Perhaps you went off in quest of good spirits, sir ?"

" What makes you say that, Germaine ?"

" Well, sir, you went away as dull as a night-cap, and you have come back as gay as a lark, and, although I am deaf, you woke me up this morning with your singing and whistling as you ran about your rooms."

" Ah, by the way, yes ; just let us speak a moment of that, for it is you, disobedient old woman, who make

me run about! Ah, my good Germaine, if I could only persuade you to let my table alone, and leave off turning it upside down, under pretext of arranging it!"

"Tell me in what corner you have hidden away a little vial which was standing there at the corner of the bureau? It was there the day before yesterday."

"There were two vials, one blue and one white," said Germaine.

"Just so."

"But don't you remember, sir, that when you were called to Madame Brichet the evening before last, Colard came five minutes later and fetched one of the two little bottles you wanted? He took the white one."

"That is so, Germaine, but as Colard made a mistake and brought me the white vial instead of the blue one, he must have brought back the white vial. Well, that is the bottle I am looking for, as it ought to be locked up to prevent accidents. Now then, where have you put it? Not in the kitchen, I hope, for that little vial contains enough poison to slaughter a whole drove of bullocks."

The old woman burst out laughing, as she answered:

"Oh, sir, I was saved the trouble of putting it by, for Colard in his hurry fell all his length on the pavement with the white vial in his hand, and it was smashed to pieces. He told me about it and said he would confess his accident to you himself. Perhaps he came to tell you yesterday, for he was here about two hours after you had started, but I think he must have had something else to say, for he seemed very much put out."

"Why didn't you ask him? You ought to have brought him in and seen what he wanted, poor chap!"

said the lovesick doctor, thinking that perhaps Colard's visit had something to do with Pauline.

"I would have done so, sir, but at the moment that handsome lady was here," answered Germaine.

"What lady?"

"The lady who came here once before when Monsieur de Lozeril was at his worst. You told me it was her visit saved him."

"Ah," said Maurice, "she came again yesterday, did she?"

"Yes, sir, and it seems she must always bring luck to the young man, for just as I shut the door I heard her say, 'A perfect triumph, my dear, and I have just come to tell you that you are accepted.' I didn't hear any more, but as soon as she had gone Monsieur de Lozeril fell to dancing and singing like a madman."

"Like me this morning, eh, Germaine?" asked the doctor, smiling at the old woman's gossip.

"Yes, sir, only that you sang after you came back, and he sang before going away, for the chevalier told me yesterday that he was off."

"Ah, he is about to leave us!" cried Maurice, quickly, as if this news inspired him with an idea.

"Yes, sir, and I can just tell you I am not sorry, for I don't like having strangers in our house. It doesn't seem as if we were at home," remarked the old servant, who considered the doctor and his house her own exclusive property.

"Really, my good Germaine, you don't care, then, about having another visitor, eh?"

"No, sir, and especially one like this chevalier, with no manners, calling me 'old fool,' indeed, and never saying 'thank you' for anything. Let him go, and a good journey to him! Certainly I won't run after him and ask him to stay," replied the old woman, to whom

the insolence of the chevalier had given so much dissatisfaction.

At this moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" cried Maurice, and the chevalier entered. At a sign from her master Germaine left the room.

"My dear doctor," said De Lozeril, "I have come to wish you good-bye."

"My servant was just this moment telling me you were going to leave us, chevalier."

"And I could not go without coming to thank you for all your goodness to me. I am sure, doctor, you rescued me from the very jaws of death, and it is to your care I owe my present happiness, for I must tell you I am going to be married," and waving his hand toward the Hotel Brichet, the chevalier added: "I am to marry Mademoiselle Pauline Brichet, whose father has been good enough to accept me for his son-in-law."

It will be remembered that on the previous day, when Maurice so suddenly left Paris, Mme. de Brageron had not yet paid her visit to the *procureur*, and the doctor was therefore ignorant of all that had happened —the proposal from the marquise and Brichet's ready acceptance. He thus suddenly learned that the girl he loved had been promised to another man, and this man an utter scoundrel. One would have supposed that on seeing his love-dreams vanish away, Maurice would have been lost in despair; but far from this, with a bright smile on his lips and in a cheerful voice he cried gayly:

"My sincere compliments, chevalier. The bride is very pretty, and she has a large fortune, which, you know, does not detract from her beauty."

"Oh, as for the fortune—" said De Lozeril with a gesture of disdainful indifference.

"Then you are contented to be simply loved by Mademoiselle Pauline Brichet?"

"You go too fast, doctor. I adore Mademoiselle Pauline, and I hope she will love me—some day—but at present she has only seen me once, although I have her father's formal permission to pay my addresses to her."

The doctor followed all these details with as little show of emotion as if Pauline had been an absolute stranger to him, and De Lozeril continued:

"If I am now leaving your hospitable abode, doctor, it is because Monsieur Brichet has begged me to go and stay at the hotel until the marriage takes place."

Maurice here interrupted the chevalier with a peal of laughter.

"Excuse my gayety," he said; "but I was just thinking what a queer thing life is! Who would ever have thought that you would one day beceme the son-in-law of the man whom you imagined you saw dying of a terrible wound—here, I think?" and the doctor raised his hand to his throat.

"No, it was here, just the same place where I was wounded," replied the chevalier, pointing to the back of his neck; and as he was bending down, to show the place of the wound, he failed to see the light that flashed for a moment in Maurice's eyes.

"Shall I always retain the mark?" asked De Lozeril.

We cannot tell whether this question took Maurice by surprise, but certain it is that the doctor had to pause and steady his voice before answering:

"No, it will disappear completely."

"So much the better," replied the chevalier, who, before asking, had recalled to mind the assertion of Annibal that there was no sign of a wound on Brichet's neck.

Seeing that the chevalier was about to depart, the doctor held out his hand, saying :

"Adieu, M. de Lozeril, and if you owe me any gratitude prove it by retaining me as doctor of the family you are about to enter, for I suppose yon know I already attend professionally at the Hotel Brichet."

"True, I remember now that the Marquise de Brageron told me you had saved M. Brichet from an almost fatal attack."

"Yes, and if you have any influence over your future father-in-law try to keep him from drinking. If he drinks, he is a lost man."

Maurice stood long on the doorstep, observing De Lozeril's retreating figure.

"Scoundrel," he exclaimed, on seeing him at last disappear.

The doctor went up to the room that had been the chevalier's for the last three months and found Germaine busy, broom in hand.

"No more visitors," she replied gayly, on seeing her master.

"Why, Germaine, you seem to have a perfect horror of visitors !" replied Maurice, smiling.

"I have indeed, sir, a holy horror !"

"Even if it happened to be a relation of mine ?"

"Oh, that would be quite a different thing ; but you have always told me you had nobody belonging to you."

"Then you are not afraid of my putting your amiability to too strong a proof."

The old woman looked at him sadly.

"Ah, Monsieur Maurice," she said, half crying, "that is not kind of you. You know very well I have a habit of always grumbling, but if I only thought I could make you happy by putting my hand in the fire, you know I would do it directly."

"Oh, oh! I have a great mind to take you at your word!"

"Light the fire, sir, and you will soon see."

"No, no, my poor Germaine, there are other ways of testing your devotion, without getting you to burn your dear old hand," replied the young man, affectionately.

"Tell me to do something impossible, sir, and I will do it."

"Impossible, do you say? Well, what I am going to ask you comes very near it."

"What can it be?" asked Germaine, curiously.

"It is to be silent and discreet, Germaine, for fifteen long days, whatever you may see and hear in this house," said Maurice, very gravely.

The entrance of Colard, who, on learning of the doctor's return, had hastened with the news of all that had happened, interrupted Maurice, who received Colard's story of the approaching marriage with such perfect calm that the old servant stared at him in amazement.

"Do you think, sir, that the future will be as charming for Mademoiselle Pauline as for him?" pursued the attendant, puzzled at the doctor's tone and manner.

"And why should Mademoiselle Brichet dread the future? This marriage is arranged by a father who adores her, and who would certainly never give his daughter to a man whom he thought unworthy of her."

"But every one says Monsieur de Lozeril is a beast! Monsieur Bandinau and Monsieur de Badieres have done everything possible to put the marriage out of my master's head, but he insists on it all the same."

"It is his right, as a father, my friend. For you can

hardly deny that he is her father, can you, Colard?" asked Maurice, with emphasis, fixing his eyes searchingly on the old servant.

The attendant made no reply to this question, but stood looking on the ground. Presently he answered:

"A father cannot command his daughter's heart, especially when that heart has already declared itself for another."

In spite of himself, the young doctor's eyes sparkled with joy at hearing these words, but he continued, with well-feigned indifference:

"Ah! So Mademoiselle Brichet is in love with somebody? And who may that happy mortal be?"

Colard, as we have said, had ever watched over Pauline with a more than paternal care, his vigilance never relaxing excepting in favor of Maurice, in whom he recognized a loyal and generous man, and whom he really believed Pauline secretly loved. It was, therefore, with the deepest mortification that he listened to the doctor's half-pitying remarks; but, not wishing to admit to himself that he had been mistaken, the old man replied:

"Whom does she love, do you say, sir? A man who, I am certain, will show himself truly worthy of her, in coming to her defense."

"Her defense! Against whom or what? You surely would never invite her to rebel against the will of her own father. Eh, Colard?"

As Maurice thus a second time invoked the parental authority, instead of promising his aid, the attendant changed color and looked earnestly in the young man's eyes as if to read his secret thoughts. He remained silent a few moments, and then, apparently, deeming the mystery inexplicable, moved slowly toward the door.

"Are you going, Colard?" asked Maurice.

"Yes, sir," answered Colard, mournfully. "I am going to tell poor Mademoiselle Pauline that she has no one to look to now but her old servant!"

Step by step, very slowly, Colard went down-stairs, vainly hoping that Maurice would repent and call him back. On reaching the hall door he still lingered, but instead of being recalled he only heard the doctor singing gayly in his room. Colard, heart-broken, murmured, with a sob:

"Ah, why has he ceased to love my sweet, unhappy Pauline?"

On his return to the hotel, Pauline ran to meet him and asked him, anxiously:

"Well, Colard?"

"Doctor Gardi has not come back yet," he said, not having the courage to tell the poor girl that he whom she loved thought no more of her; but as Colard was speaking Pauline saw Maurice enter the garden and direct his steps toward the pavilion.

"Why should Colard thus deceive me," she asked herself, fearing she knew not what; but on seeing the grief depicted on the old man's face, she believed that Colard himself had been deceived. For the first time in her innocent life, Pauline, swayed by the irresistible influence of love, lent herself to a small deception.

"I am going down to the pavilion to see how Aurore is to-day," she said.

"You will find M. de Badieres there. He has just been visiting your father, and has now gone to call on Madame Brichet," replied Colard, as the young girl disappeared.

It was, therefore, with something like fright that, on pushing the door of the *boudoir*, whither she had flown on wings of love, she found herself in the pres-

ence of Maurice, alone. A vivid blush overspread her features, as she stood, for a moment, holding the handle of the door. Her embarrassment was of short duration, for following close behind her M. de Badieres entered the pavilion, with Aurore leaning on his arm.

"Paulinette!" cried the judge affectionately, "are you blind and deaf? You passed quite close to us without taking the slightest notice, though I called out to you. Come here and kiss me, pretty pet."

When Colard had gone Maurice reflected that he had, perhaps, carried his assumption of indifference toward Pauline too far, and he cried, suddenly:

"I must speak to her! But how am I to see her? Well, after all, I am attending Madame Aurore and Monsieur Brichet, and I may as well pay them a professional visit. I shall indeed be unlucky if somehow I do not get near Pauline."

Fortune had favored Maurice, for on entering the garden he had seen Madame Brichet and the judge seated on a bench, enjoying the spring sunshine. On perceiving him, Aurore with a grateful gesture had signified her intention of joining him in the pavilion, which he at once entered. A moment later Pauline had appeared, out of breath with her rapid flight across the garden. Had she been able to hear, the dialogue would have somewhat surprised her, for M. de Badieres was saying kindly to Aurore:

"My dear child, the secret with which you trusted me is now known, since yesterday, to a third person."

Aurore looked terrified; the judge hastened to add:

"Oh, do not be afraid. The person I have told is a gentleman who would die rather than reveal a secret confided to his honor. Besides, it is he who holds in his hand the fate of Monsieur de Cambiac."

Aurore raised her lovely eyes imploringly to the

judge's face, and he, answering the mute appeal, replied :

"It is His Royal Highness, Monseigneur, the Regent of France. I have told him everything—of the baron's innocence and his noble sacrifice of himself to save your reputation, as well as your resolution to exculpate him, if necessary, by a public avowal of the truth, and these are the words of his royal highness : 'De Cambiac has behaved like a true gentleman. In his place I trust I should have done the same. Tell the lady that she must not render useless his noble self-sacrifice by making a public scandal, for I will undertake to save Monsieur de Cambiac.'"

Aurore listened, radiant with joy, as the judge continued :

"This is what has been decided. De Cambiac will be allowed to escape secretly and reach a foreign land. It always being understood that the baron is in prison, his trial will be indefinitely postponed, and in the meantime it is hoped that the police will be able to discover the real assassin of that cursed De Lozeril."

Mme. Brichet had eagerly listened to every word of the magistrate, and when he ceased to speak, despite the immense joy that filled her bosom at the thought of her friend's safety, two large tears trembled in her eyes, and a wail of despair rose from her heart to her lips as she sobbed out :

"I shall never see him again !"

"But as soon as the assassin is discovered M. de Cambiac can return to France," added the judge.

"I shall never see him again," she repeated, mournfully.

"Do you remember, madame, that you swore to be an irreproachable wife," asked the magistrate, sternly.

At this moment Pauline flitted past them. After

vainly calling her, the judge arose and followed her, accompanied by Aurore, who speedily regained her composure.

Such were the events preceding Annibal's famous supper, to which we must now return. Be it said, however, that although the moments were but few that elapsed between the entrance of Pauline to the pavilion and the arrival of Aurore and the judge, Maurice had found time to say :

" Pauline, my darling, you know I love you madly. Wnatever they may say and whatever they may do, trust me always and believe that I am watching over you !"

CHAPTER XXII.

Brichet had no sooner locked his door and drawn the bolts, than Fouquier cried :

"Come, chevalier ; quick to the table ! Our friends are waiting for us upstairs."

Instead of answering the captain's summons, De Lozeril stood still before the bolted door, apparently in reflection, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

"What makes you so merry ?" asked Annibal, who was half-way up the stairs.

"My thoughts."

"What were you thinking about, dear friend ?" asked Annibal, standing still on the staircase.

"Oh, you are too inquisitive !" said the chevalier, in a mocking tone.

"Well, please yourself !" retorted Annibal, dryly, continuing his ascent, on seeing that De Lozeril did not wish to speak.

The table had been laid in a room adjoining the captain's bedroom, and in order to dispense with the presence of servants, the supper had been served in advance—four chosen guests being already seated around the board, hungry and impatient. Annibal's entrance was greeted with a murmur of satisfaction, which was cut short by the appearance of De Lozeril, whom the guests did not know.

"Gentlemen, allow me to introduce to you the Chevalier de Lozeril, a good enemy of mine, with whom I have much pleasure in laughing and drinking while waiting for something better," said Fouquier grimly, still under the recent irritation of the scene on the stair.

On this introduction, so full of covert menace, the guests turned toward De Lozeril and surveyed him curiously. All of them, it appeared, had a very high opinion of Annibal's fighting powers, for the looks with which they favored the chevalier might have been bestowed on a criminal who had just received sentence of death. De Lozeril, however, was not in the least dismayed, and smiling in his most agreeable manner, bowed to the guests, saying :

"The pleasure of being in such charming company has induced me to accept the captain's invitation, with whom, as he has told you, I am in high esteem."

"Good !" said Annibal. "Now, De Lozeril, sit down there and let us drink fair while awaiting the approaching pleasure of cutting each other's throats. As for you, gentlemen, it is quite unnecessary to incite you to do your duty."

And in truth these "kind friends" of Annibal had little need of encouragement in the matter of eating and drinking, for if their morality was weak, their powers of absorption were strong. Was De Lozeril sufficiently strong to hold his own against these seasoned topers, on whom even a fifth bottle had no perceptible effect? It appeared so, at first, for the chevalier accepted every invitation of Annibal ; and seated face to face the two enemies could not cheat one another of a single glass. But unfortunately for De Lozeril, long practice had made the captain his superior at drinking as well as fighting. By degrees

the chevalier grew more and more noisy and loquacious, and his speech became thick and indistinct.

"Man overboard!" cried his neighbor with a sardonic grin; to which De Lozeril with drunken vanity retorted:

"What do you mean? Do you mean to say I 'm drunk?"

"Well, something like it, chevalier," replied the *convive*, who understood by a sign from the captain that he was to irritate the young man. "I have seen a young girl like that when she had drunk neither more nor less than you."

Like most drunkards, De Lozeril was full of boasting and defiance, and he rashly cried:

"I can drink better than you any day, old idiot, and I wager I can turn off three bottles while you are finishing two!"

So saying the young man rose from his chair and made for a sideboard where a perfect regiment of bottles was ranged in reserve; but he had only taken a few steps when he stumbled and fell heavily into a chair.

There De Lozeril sat helpless, his arms hanging listlessly and his head sunk on his breast, muttering, from time to time, unintelligible words. The fumes of wine, having mounted to his brain, had thus delivered the chevalier defenseless into his enemy's hand.

"You ought to put the baby to bed; he is incapable of connecting two ideas," said the neighbor.

"My ideas are a great deal clearer than yours, you drunken fool," roared De Lozeril. "Ask me whatever you like and see if I don't answer you, wretched wine barrel!"

The captain, taking advantage of the chevalier's offer, said:

"Look here, De Lozeril, what were you laughing at, two hours ago, before Brichet's door?"

Utterly bereft of all prudence, De Lozeril hiccoughed out, with an idiotic laugh:

"Ah, yes, and I can't help laughing now. This is what it was, I suspect you—you suspect me—we watch each other. Well, I was thinking to myself what a joke it would be if, while we two are up here, the bird should fly away all by itself!"

"Gad, he is right," cried Annibal, vaguely alarmed.

But with the rapidly changing caprice of a drunken man, De Lozeril had already forgotten what he had said, and now stammered:

"I want to go—to go to bed! My head's splitting. When I have slept a little I shall come back and drink."

"The truth is, he will be much better in his bed. He will only bore us all the night. It will save us trouble in the end to carry him to his room," suggested the chevalier's neighbor.

"Yes, let's carry him to his room," added another, rising to lend his aid.

But the captain, like a prudent man, deemed it wiser to keep his enemy under his own eye.

"No, no," he said, "what is the good of that? At this hour every one is asleep, and he is certain to wake the whole house."

"Well, but we can't have him here the whole night, tumbling about first to the right and then to the left," cried the neighbor, who was holding the young man propped up in his chair.

"Ah, I have an idea," cried another. "Suppose we carry him into the next room and lay him on the captain's bed."

"All right," said Annibal, by this plan keeping De Lozeril under surveillance.

And accordingly they lifted the chevalier, who was now sound asleep, upon the bed, covering him with a cloak of Fouquier's.

Suspicion of Brichet's possible flight so possessed Annibal's mind that he became fidgety and restless. In five minutes he could bear it no longer. So, rising from the table, he left the room, after saying to his guests :

" I don't feel very sure about our tipsy friend ; he might wake up and make a row in the house trying to find his way back to his bedroom. I think I had better turn the key in the outside door," and Annibal passed into his own room.

By the light that entered from the door of the supper-room, which he had left ajar, he could distinguish the form of the chevalier lying in a dark heap on the bed. Annibal approached, bent over him, and listened.

" Yes, he is asleep," he said, hearing a snore issuing from the folds of the cloak, and feeling certain that De Lozeril could neither see nor hear, he advanced to the secret door and gently pushed the spring. It flew open, and he descended the stair into the grand *salon*.

Brichet had left the door of his bedroom wide open. It was brilliantly lighted, and from his " coin of vantage " Annibal saw the old man undressing. Quite relieved, the captain ascended to his own room, where De Lozeril was still snoring in happy innocence.

" There, that's done," he said, returning to his guests, " and now if the fellow wants to get up and make a racket he can't."

His expedition had not occupied more than three minutes, but had it been twice as long the guests were too well occupied with the bottles to notice his absence. And now, indeed, did the noble Annibal feel

"o'er all the ills of life victorious." After the terrible fright De Lozeril had given him over Brichet, he felt entitled to a double share of enjoyment, and returned to his carouse with much good will. In a very short time he had the table to himself, his guests having one by one sunk gracefully to a well-earned repose beneath its hospitable shelter. Annibal's former uneasiness again took possession of his heated brain.

"Too much caution never does any harm," he thought; "let's see if the old man is still all right," and he passed into his bedroom.

His first care was to assure himself that the chevalier was asleep, and seeing the cloak-covered mass lying immovable on the bed, he crossed the room and applied his finger to the spring of the hidden door.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "It does not act!" and he made another effort. Useless! All at once a suspicion flashed across him. He rushed to the bed and dragged off the cloak. De Lozeril was gone! In his stead were four large cushions taken from the arm-chairs. On finding himself thus cleverly duped, the captain's wrath knew no bounds.

"The devil! He was no more drunk than a duck, and I have shown him the secret door by which he has got to Brichet!"

The fact was but too evident. De Lozeril, feigning intoxication, had stolen a march on the captain and gone down to Brichet's apartments. But how long had he been gone? This was the thought that now tormented Annibal's somewhat cloudy imagination. He returned from his inspection of the scantily-dressed *procureur* at one o'clock after midnight, and five o'clock was now striking from the Church of St. Louis. The chevalier had thus had the advantage of four hours' start.

"They may be far away by this time," thought the giant, twirling his mustache convulsively.

The first thing to be done was to get down to Brichet's room at once, but the door of the secret stair being now unavailable, there remained only the alternative of descending by the grand staircase and ascertaining whether the outside door of Brichet's apartments was open, as the two fugitives would probably in their hurry have neglected to lock it. Taking a candle, he stepped out on the landing and began to descend the stair.

"What on earth is that?" he cried, stopping in the middle, and on the landing, opposite Brichet's door, the outline of a figure was faintly visible.

At the sound of his footsteps the figure moved, then drew itself suddenly up; but before it could vanish Annibal had seized it in his vigorous grasp and, by the glimmer of the candle, he beheld the pale face of Colard, seemingly half asleep.

"Hello, Colard! What the mischief are you doing here at this time of night, sitting on the stair when you ought to be in bed?"

"I was waiting, captain, for your friends to go away, sir, as I have to shut the great door after them. Beside, you or these gentlemen might be wanting something, and every one else has gone to bed."

And Annibal, knowing full well the peculiar habit of the old man on this point, accepted the explanation. But, while speaking, he mechanically advanced his foot a step and, surprised to find something pressing against his knee, he stooped down to see what the obstacle was.

"Why, what's this?" he cried, finding it was a cord tied at one end round Colard's wrist, the other end attached to the handle of Brichet's door.

Colard, smiling, replied :

"Oh, it 's very simple, sir. You see, I sleep very soundly, so I tied this string to my hand that it might go right across the stair, and then when any of these gentlemen came down I should feel them pushing against it and that would wake me up at once."

"Yes, Colard, very simple, like all great inventions, my friend, and your idea is the more remarkable, as it can be made to serve two purposes. It 's quite by chance, I suppose—pure accident—that you tie your cord to the handle of Brichet's door, eh ?" asked Annibal, in a tone of jeering mockery.

"Quite by accident, as you say, sir. I tied it to the first thing that came to hand," replied the major-domo.

"You old humbug ! You think I 'm going to swallow that ?" thought Annibal, and he continued aloud :

"Really, and it never occurred to you that as this door opens to the inside, if any one tried to come out of the room your arm would get such a pull that you could hardly fail to see the person."

"Well, now, I never thought of that before, but who would be coming out of my master's room in the night ?" Colard asked innocently.

"Brichet himself—perhaps."

Colard laughed.

"In that case, sir, Monsieur Brichet has never moved this night, for here have I been sitting ever since twelve o'clock, and not a soul has passed."

This answer caused the captain's heart to leap for joy, for he reflected that as De Lozeril could not possibly have reached Brichet before one o'clock, they must therefore be shut up together in the room, so he continued in quite an affectionate manner :

"Come, go to bed, my good man. It is too fatiguing

for an old fellow like you to be sitting up so late. Besides, it is useless, for my friends are not nearly through yet. They have a pile of bottles to empty that will keep them well into the morning." And Annibal slowly remounted the stair, repeating as he went, "Go to bed, Colard, there's a good fellow."

"Well, captain, I won't refuse, so good night, and thank you, sir," replied Colard, rising and descending the stair.

Fouquier entered his bedroom, shutting the door noisily that the attendant might hear him. He then blew out the candle, opened the door very gently and came out on the landing. He leaned over the banister and listened. Instead of Colard's footsteps becoming fainter and fainter in the distance, they suddenly stopped altogether. Then after a moment of complete silence the captain heard the old man stealthily remount the stair and once more station himself before his master's door.

"What the mischief has put that game into his head to-night?" thought the captain, sorely puzzled and little thinking that for sixteen previous nights Colard had thus been on the watch.

Colard was fully aware of Annibal's maneuver.

"The captain is spying me," he thought. "Instead of their shouting and singing it is all quiet up there now, so he left them dead drunk while he prowls about the staircase watching this door. I saw how delighted he seemed when I said no one had passed out. What can those two scoundrels be up to? Is it to-night they will smash each other?" and the old man reseated himself on the stair, waiting—silent—in the darkness.

Like the wild beast, who, on seeing his prey about to escape, seizes it once more in his cruel claws, the captain felt a terrible satisfaction.

"I 've got De Lozeril," he said, "he 's caught in a real trap this time. The idiot ought to have escaped at once. He could easily have knocked over Colard if the old fellow made any resistance, but the imbecile thought he had lots of time before him, and that I would be asleep under the table long ago with these brutes in there." But now a suspicion flashed across the captain's mind. "Surely," he thought, "in four hours De Lozeril has had time enough to persuade Brichet to get off with the spoil; then, why haven't they gone? Can they have got out of the window? It is rather high, but De Lozeril is lithe enough and"—but the idea was too horrible. The captain could not follow it out. A vision appeared to his beclouded mind of De Lozeril, unwilling to embarrass his flight with an old man, quietly murdering the *procureur* and decamping by the window with all the millions! "And a nice mess that will be for me," he concluded, "for with my shady reputation they will say it is I who have murdered the old man!" and, returning to his room he attempted a second time to remove the spring of the secret door, but in vain. "Come, said he, I must try something else," and applying his powerful shoulder to the wood-work, in one moment the door was burst in, and he had barely time to catch it and save it from clattering noisily down the stair. Sticking in the spring, he found the chevalier's rapier, which he seized on, crying gaily: "That's one weapon less for that ass, De Lozeril, if we do come to close quarters and settle our accounts down-stairs." Fouquier returned for a moment to take a last look at his drunken friends, who were peaceably snoring side by side. "A cannon wouldn't wake them," he said. "So now I can attend to my little family matters without fear of being disturbed," and, taking his heavy rapier from

its place on the wall, he began to descend the secret stair, murmuring the while: "Come now, let's see whether I am really an unhappy father-in-law bereft of his well-beloved son!"

Annibal descended slowly and carefully, with the air of a man who knows he is about to face a mortal peril. De Lozeril had evidently imagined that he had effectually barred out the captain by closing the secret stair, for the door of the *salon* yielded at once to the pressure of his hand. He stopped a moment before entering, and listened intently.

"Yes, my two rabbits are still in their hole!" he murmured joyfully.

Impossible to describe the immense satisfaction of Fouquier on hearing distinctly the two voices. He was now certain that Brichet had neither been robbed nor murdered, and he had the further delight of knowing that De Lozeril was there, in his power, at the mercy of his rapier! He drew it gently from its sheath and advanced stealthily. Screened by the darkness of the *salon*, he stood still, watching with amazement the scene presented to his view through the open door of Brichet's bedroom. The *procureur's* bed was unoccupied, and had evidently not been slept in, although when Annibal had last seen Brichet he was in his shirt and in the act of taking off his stockings. How did it happen that Brichet was now fully dressed and his bed untouched? Had De Lozeril compelled the old man to relinquish his intention of going to bed and forced him to dress himself? It appeared so; but what on earth had happened to Brichet? He was completely metamorphosed. Instead of his habitual dress of severe and dignified black, the *procureur* wore a gray costume of quite a modern cut, and his solemn legal wig had given place to a fashionable and jaunty

peruke, entirely changing his face and its expression. His feet, no longer incased in their usual flat-heeled shoes, were now equipped with a pair of strong riding-boots and spurs. It was certainly Brichet, but Brichet so perfectly transformed that Annibal could scarcely believe his senses. The sight of the spurs was a revelation to him. "Yes," he said, "I see it now! When I saw the old fellow undressed he was not going to bed, he was only changing his clothes to be ready to decamp with De Lozeril," and the captain could not repress a smile at the idea of Brichet perched upon a horse—he who confessed that during his recent travels he had never even had the courage to bestride a donkey. But the captain's gayety soon gave place to wonder, and he racked his brains as to what could have delayed the two men so long in taking flight. What had they been doing these four hours, and what were they now talking about? He advanced nearer to them and listened. De Lozeril and Brichet were seated one on each side of the table, the chevalier's back being turned to Fouquier, while his father-in-law faced him. The *procureur* was pale and his eyes glared with a strange, wild look that Annibal had never before witnessed on his usually rather stupid countenance. "Can it be the wig that so changes him?" thought Annibal, and as he came within earshot he heard De Lozeril say:

"We shall burn this document, then? That is agreed?"

"Burn it," answered Brichet, curtly, and the chevalier held a corner of the paper to the flame of a candle on the table. Another moment and it was in ashes, and then De Lozeril remarked in a mocking tone:

"There! Now that beast Annibal's little game is played out."

"Oh, oh! It seems my dear friend is interesting himself in my concerns. Very well, my boy, we shall see about that," said the captain to himself, nervously fingering his rapier, and now he heard De Lozeril exclaim with mingled triumph and cupidity:

"Now let us share!" whereon Brichet replied, hoarse with suppressed anger and impotent rage:

"Yes, let us share!"

"A division of the spoil," thought the captain. "Now is the moment for me to introduce myself."

And he advanced toward the table.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Before proceeding with our story we must briefly explain the events preceding the scene described in our last chapter. De Lozeril, on seeing Annibal come upstair again from his visit to Brichet, thus revealing to him the existence of the secret door, resolved to avail himself of the discovery and to descend at once to Brichet's apartments. So hastily piling up the cushions and covering them with the cloak, he lost no time in setting out on his expedition. His daring spirit scented an adventure and, since the confidence made to him by Colard, the thought of the immense treasure carried about by Brichet haunted him day and night. This treasure consisted partly of Pauline's *dot*. De Lozeril cared very little about Pauline, but he cared a great deal about Pauline's *dot*. Nay, he had determined it should be his by fair means or foul. "Let Brichet be off as soon as he likes," was his one absorbing thought; "but he sha' n't go before he leaves me Pauline's money."

"He is going to bed," Annibal had thought as he watched Brichet removing his stockings. "He is getting up," said De Lozeril, on taking the captain's place to spy on the *procureur*. For Brichet, whom

Annibal had seen almost entirely undressed, was now discovered by the chevalier busily making his toilet. "What is he putting on?" thought the young man as he watched the *procureur* take from the bottom of a cupboard one garment after another, garments so unlike his usual grave attire that the young man could scarcely repress an exclamation. Brichet completed his toilet and, looking at himself in the glass, murmured, in a low tone:

"There. Like old times. It's a long time since I saw myself in this costume!"

"I suppose these are the clothes he went off in before," thought De Lozeril, in explanation of Brichet's soliloquy.

"I'm not an ounce fatter," continued the *procureur*, clasping his waistband. "The life of luxury has not done me much good," and, turning once more to the cupboard: "Now for the vest." Taking it out, two heavy objects fell from the pockets. "Ah, to be sure! *Piff* and *Paff!* I had left them in my pockets," said the *procureur*, stooping and picking up two pistols.

"For a lawyer, he seems to know pretty well how to handle fire-arms," remarked the chevalier, on seeing Brichet snap the triggers with a practiced hand.

And a great sigh broke from him as he laid them on the table, saying, regretfully:

"Ah, my faithful friends! Our good old times are past and gone."

"I wonder if he negotiated with his clients, pistol in hand, in his good old times," thought the young man, with increasing amazement.

At last Brichet had completed his toilet.

"Now for serious affairs," he cried gayly, and going to a heavy iron box he drew out a large, bulky pocket-book.

"The millions!" thought the chevalier. "Serious affairs, indeed!" and with difficulty he restrained a cry of ecstasy at sight of the treasure. "But what the devil has taken him now?" he exclaimed to himself quickly, as Brichet, with glistening eyes, his fingers clasping the morocco, kissed and hugged the pocket-book in a perfect frenzy of delight, uttering the while little inarticulate shrieks of joy. He seemed to have suddenly gone mad, lavished on the pocketbook the most endearing names, holding it to his breast and rocking it to and fro as if it were an infant. "Faith, he seems preciously fond of his little pile. I shall have some trouble in getting him to part with the *dot*," thought De Lozeril, amazed at so much enthusiasm. By degrees the *procureur* became calm, and remarking: "Let's put the baby in a safe place," he laid the treasure on his bosom and proceeded to rebutton his vest, the bulky pocketbook making considerable difference in the outline of his figure. Brichet caught sight of himself in a looking-glass and burst out laughing. "And I was saying a few minutes ago that I was not an ounce fatter," and he laughed again. Then taking one last look round the room, he walked toward the door, but returning with a hurried exclamation, "Ah, I had almost forgotten *Piff* and *Paff*," the *procureur* found himself face to face with De Lozeril, who, barring the way, asked him in a tone of mockery:

"Where were you going, Monsieur Brichet, and without a word of farewell to your future son-in-law, in the dead of night, and ill, too, for you seem to be terribly swollen," and De Lozeril made a thrust with his finger at Brichet's breast, just where the treasure lay. Brichet became deadly pale, his limbs trembled under him, and in a voice sick and faint with terror he gasped out:

"We 'll go halves—hold your tongue!"

But at the sound of his own voice Brichet's panic seemed to vanish, and the words had no sooner left his lips than he suddenly roused himself and, still staring wildly at the chevalier, he stammered:

"De Lozeril, is that you?"

Shaking with fright, Brichet appeared like a man awakened suddenly from a horrid dream. As he surveyed himself and his costume with seeming amazement, the thought occurred vividly to De Lozeril that the whole scene had been enacted by a somnambulist. As if to confirm his suspicion, Brichet gazed vacantly around the room, murmuring to himself:

"How am I in this *salon* dressed in these clothes, when I went to sleep in my arm-chair, with my dressing-gown on?"

The chevalier listened.

"I was right," he said. "He was walking in his sleep, and now remembers nothing," but at that moment a look shot from Brichet's eyes toward his pistols, lying on the table before which De Lozeril stood.

"Oh, ho, my friend," he thought, "it seems you do remember something. I have not the slightest doubt now that you remember all the rest. You have been trying to dupe me with your pretended somnambulism," and the chevalier was once more on his guard.

Then, with the air of a man half awake, the *procureur* staggered forward a few paces, as if at random, but in the direction of his pistols.

De Lozeril saw the move, and checkmated it by going hastily toward him and saying, in the most affectionate manner:

"Allow me to support you, dear Monsieur Brichet;

you really seem so very weak and ill," and passing his arm under Brichet's so as to hold him securely in case of resistance, he led the *procureur* gently away from the table, taking him to an arm-chair, into which he dropped sullenly.

"There now, calm yourself my good friend, while I fetch you a glass of water," said the chevalier, in his most amiable accents, moving quickly to the table, whereon, side by side with the pistols was a *carafe* of water and a glass.

"Hello, pistols!" he cried, astonished, as if he had just perceived them.

A savage light sparkled in Brichet's eyes as the young man took them in his hands.

"Good work, excellent steel and a capital spring," said De Lozeril, who quietly opened the chambers and allowed the balls to drop out.

The *procureur* could not altogether stifle a cry of impotent rage on seeing the chevalier replace the now useless weapons on the table.

"Ah," cried De Lozeril, "you are ill. Dear friend, I beg a thousand pardons. Excuse my forgetfulness; instead of amusing myself with these fire-arms I ought to have fetched you the glass of water you wanted." The young man took the *carafe* in his hand. "Bah!" he cried. "Cold water is wretched stuff, and without being much of a doctor, let me rather recommend a glass of that excellent Kirsch. I see a whole bottle standing on that sideboard." So saying he filled the glass to the brim and presented it to the old man.

But the *procureur* shook his head.

"What, you won't take it? My dear Monsieur Brichet, indeed you are wrong, for nothing is better than a good glass of Kirsch for calming violent emotion. If I were dead I feel certain a few sips of this would

bring me to life again," and while speaking De Lozeril placed the glass on the edge of the table.

The shock seemed to have seriously affected Brichet, for he sat there in the arm-chair, staring vacantly before him as if he had been petrified. At last he asked, in a dazed manner:

"Why did you leave the supper?"

"For your sake, my good friend. I felt certain that the noise we made must prevent your sleeping; so I came down to keep you company."

After a momentary hesitation Brichet continued:

"But how did you get in here when I had locked and bolted the door?"

"How did I get in? Come, just think a moment. Stir up your memory."

Brichet stared at him in blank surprise.

"My memory?" he repeated mechanically.

"Yes, try to remember something very agreeable. Go back to the time when as a devoted husband you used to go and wish Madame Brichet good-night. You understand now, don't you, eh?"

"Yes, yes, yes," repeated Brichet, as if suddenly recalling some memory.

"I tell you frankly," continued the chevalier, "it was Annibal himself who put me up to the secret of the stairway between your room and his."

"What! There's a stairway!" cried the *procureur*, starting up convulsively in his chair, "and the captain can come down to my room whenever he likes?"

"But my dear friend," replied the chevalier, "let us understand each other. You seem as if I was talking to you of something supernatural, but a little while ago you said you remembered the secret passage perfectly."

On this observation Brichet closed his eyes and

leaned back in his chair as if to gain time. Then seeming to recover himself, he said with a sad smile :

"You must excuse me, but since my illness my memory sometimes fails me, and often the things with which I am most familiar seem to escape me altogether. I tell you candidly, there are moments when I really think I am out of my mind."

"You not only *think* it, but you really *are* mad—mad as a hatter, my friend!" thought the chevalier, and after a moment's silence the *procureur* continued :

"And Annibal, is he coming down here, too ?"

"No, no, keep your mind easy. I 've made a nice little arrangement to prevent him from troubling us," and the chevalier smiled with satisfaction at the thought of his rapier sticking fast in the secret spring. Taking up the glass of Kirsch he again presented it to the *procureur*. "Come, drink this," he said. "It will clear your head and refresh your memory ; for now I have something to say about this memory of yours. You remember that I asked for your daughter's hand through Madame de Brageron ?"

"Perfectly, and I accepted you at once."

"And with your daughter's hand I was to receive a *dot* of two millions. Do you remember that ?"

"Certainly."

And now laying aside his former gay and charming manner, De Lozeril assumed a threatening tone toward the defenseless old man, as he continued :

"After promising me your daughter and her money, will you, if you please, state your reasons for delaying the fulfillment of the arrangement ? Why, when I have reminded you of the engagement, have you put me off with a parcel of empty excuses, making me a laughing stock to all my friends ?"

Alone, in the dead of night, with a man whom he

had been warned by his best friends was capable of any desperate deed, the *procureur* trembled as the chevalier accentuated his last words with a terribly menacing tone.

"What do you want to do?" gasped the old man.

"By Jove, I can easily answer that question. I want your daughter *and her money*," replied the chevalier, coolly.

On this Brichet, who had firmly believed that De Lozeril was about to murder him, heaved a thankful sigh of relief as he answered promptly :

"Before the end of this week Pauline shall be your wife, and I will pay you over her *dot*. I give you my word. I am ready to sign a contract to that effect at once."

But the young man again shook his head and retorted :

"Yes, a contract is a very good thing, but it won't do for me."

"Why not? What do you mean?" demanded Brichet.

"I mean that a contract is only good so long as the contracting parties are there to carry it out."

"Am I not here, and am I not an honest man?" cried the insulted *procureur*.

"Very possibly, my good sir, but unfortunately you are something besides an honest man!" replied De Lozeril, looking him in the face.

"What am I, then?"

"My dear sir, you are a somnambulist."

As this answer drawled out with the most insolent flippancy, a shudder convulsed the old man's frame, and despite himself he looked toward the pistols, but at the recollection that they were unloaded and therefore useless, an expression of rage distorted his features. De Lozeril was almost frightened at the horrible

expression of Brichet's countenance, now revealed to him for the first time, but without losing an atom of his *sang-froid*, he continued, pointing with his finger to the glass :

"Drink, I tell you. There is nothing like Kirsch to rouse a man."

But the old man again turned a deaf ear to the invitation.

"Well, since you won't drink," pursued the chevalier, "I shall now go on. You offer me a written contract, and I would willingly accept it, my dear Brichet, but for your little infirmity of sleep-walking. What should I do with the written promise of a man who might get up some fine night, dress himself and quietly decamp the Lord knows where, and awake to find himself so far—so very far—from here that he would think it useless ever to come back again."

Only by an intense effort had the *procureur* been able to control the fury that blazed within him as he listened to the chevalier's mockery, and as the latter ceased to speak Brichet threw himself back in his chair with a boisterous laugh, in which there was but little merriment :

"Where, my dear chevalier, did you get hold of the absurd idea that I walk in my sleep," he asked.

De Lozeril was not to be duped by his fictitious gayety.

"Ah, you think you are going to trick me. Wait a little, my friend," he said to himself, and then continued aloud : "What, then, you don't walk in your sleep ! So much the better a thousand times, for I assure you I was seriously alarmed. But just tell me why, in the dead of night—in that dress, the very opposite of your usual costume, booted and spurred—you were going out in company with *Piff* and *Paff* carefully loaded ?"

Brichet followed the chevalier's words with the deepest anxiety, but finding he made no mention of the pocket-book, he appeared now at his ease, and answered dryly :

"Am I not my own master? Can I not do as I please without giving an account to any one?"

"Faith, that 's very well answered," cried the chevalier, with fine sarcasm. "I really thought you were going to tell me you were on your way to the notary, booted and spurred and pistol in hand, to give him back—hum !—what you' ve got in there, you know," and De Lozeril once more made a thrust with his finger at Brichet's breast.

The old man drew himself back, quickly, to avoid the chevalier's touch, and the latter burst into a peal of mocking laughter.

"Ah, ha !" he cried. "It seems you are rather ticklish in that direction, for the first time I attempted to lay a finger on you it had such a very startling effect that you made me a most agreeable proposal, on the spot. Do you remember what you said, eh ?"

Brichet was silent.

"Ah, true," pursued De Lozeril, "I forgot you said your memory often played you false. Well, I can help you. When I attempted to put my finger on your breast (by the way, I suppose it is rather sensitive, as it is tremendously swollen), I remember that you cried out : 'Halves.' Now do you remember ?"

But the *procureur* remained mute as a fish.

"Come, speak, worthy old man. I want to hear you confirm those delicious words," persisted De Lozeril.

"I remember nothing," stammered the *procureur*, with a painful effort.

"What, are you ill, my poor Brichet? I am sure

you are suffocating in that tight belt of yours. Open it, my friend; make yourself easy. Come, allow me to unbutton it for you," and seeing the young man rise and make a movement toward him, Brichet crossed his arms on his breast and gasped:

"I confess, I confess."

"What do you confess, dear friend?" asked De Lozeril, calmly, in his sweetest tones.

"I confess that I am a somnambulist."

"Ah, poor old man! See how this avowal has upset you. Come, now, drink this Kirsch and arouse yourself." But again M. Brichet refused the proffered glass and the audacious chevalier continued: "Then, since you confess to walking in your sleep, I must return to our starting-point and repeat that I can have no faith in the promise, spoken or written, of a father-in-law, who on any fine night might disappear. Yes, my dear sir, you are doubtless an honest man, anxious to keep your word, but as your infirmity might cause you to fail in your endeavors, I have thought of a simple plan by which the difficulty might be overcome. You agreed to sign an engagement giving me Pauline for my wife, did you not?"

"Yes."

"With a splendid *dot?*"

"Yes," faltered the old man.

"Well, now, let us reverse the order of things. It is I who will give you a promise to marry the girl after having received her *dot* in advance."

Brichet started with surprise.

"What," he cried, "the *dot* before the marriage!"

"By this means, you see, I shall secure myself against a fit of sleep-walking which might carry my *dot* to the devil. Isn't that a simple plan, eh?" and De Lozeril, holding out his hands to Brichet, added in his most

bewitching manner : " Now, dear father-in-law, accept my proposal graciously and pay up."

But stupefaction at this audacity had rendered Brichet motionless.

" Oh, my dear friend, do you know that you really wound my susceptibilities ? One would think that you doubted my promise to marry Pauline after receiving her *dot*," said the chevalier in a tone of gentle reproach. His insolence seemed at length to rouse the old man and untie his tongue, for he exclaimed with energy :

" Never !"

" Is that your last word ?" asked De Lozeril with menace.

" Never !" reiterated Brichet.

Pale with rage, De Lozeril drew a chair to the table, and sitting down, faced the old man resolutely, looking him straight in the eyes. Then in a cruelly cutting voice he said :

" Listen to me, old man. Let us leave off all this humbug about somnambulism and speak to each other clearly. I caught you flying from this house with an immense sum of money concealed beneath your vest. Do not attempt to deny it. These millions, are they yours ? If so why are you carrying them off secretly ? I cannot tell, but one thing I know —that your flight conceals some infamy, and above all some mysterious danger which must be threatening you and from which you would seek to save yourself. The surest proof of my assertion is that there you are trembling before me, not daring to call for help. And why ? Because the peril that threatens you from without is more terrible than the danger you now face at my hands."

Brichet shook his head.

" Do not deny it. When I stopped you at first you

were half dead with guilty terror, and the consequence of your flight being known must be something fatal to you, as you tried to avert it by these words, 'We 'll go halves!' You pass yourself off as a sort of lunatic, whereas I have studied you and I know what you are—false, cunning, crafty, hypocritically clever."

Brichet tried to interrupt him, but he proceeded :

"Hold your tongue. You pretend to be an easy, good-natured fellow. False again—for twice the expression of your face has betrayed you, and I know you for what you are—coldly, desperately resolute, capable of anything, even murder, and if I had not taken the precaution to unload your pistols, I should not be here alive at this moment." Then pointing to Brichet's costume, he continued : "These clothes, so foreign to your profession, you are perfectly accustomed to, you have been in the habit of wearing, and I watched you in your boots and spurs. You are well used to them, and Heaven knows they would be embarrassing enough to an ordinary man of the law accustomed to his flat-heeled shoes! As for your pistols, you manage them with a well-practiced hand; in short, are *you* the person you pretend to be? I cannot tell. I do not know; but what I do know is that you are a knave! So am I. Now, between two knaves there cannot be any misunderstanding; so, now, listen to me. This 'half' that you offered me I accept. I must and will have it." M. Brichet trembled, and De Lozeril went on resolutely : "Yes, have it I shall. Whoever you may really be, the world knows you and accepts you as the Procureur Brichet, and the whole town knows that I am to be your son-in-law. You have seven millions. I must have the half. You will give me a declaration in writing that you have handed me this money as your daughter's *dot*, so

that I may account for the possession of it, and enjoy it in peace. This proof of your confidence in me, prior to the marriage, will be received with astonishment, but every one believes you to be half mad, and once I have the money in my pocket I will marry Pauline as soon as you can prevail on her to consent. Now, you may speak!" and, folding his arms and leaning back in his chair, the chevalier waited.

With pale lips and a trembling heart, Brichet demanded:

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then I will strangle you and hang your body to one of those beams. Your reputation for insanity will cause it to be believed that you have committed suicide." The young man's tone was not to be mistaken, and Brichet understood the reality of his menace and appeared to submit.

"If I accept?" he asked.

The chevalier once more leaned across the table, and, looking steadily at Brichet, said slowly:

"If you accept I will assist you in your flight from this house."

An unspeakable joy lighted up the face of Brichet on this assurance, and his heart beat so wildly as almost to choke him. He could only give utterance to a single word:

"Truly."

"Ah, see now what a scoundrel you are!" cried De Lozeril, in a fit of laughter at the old man's emotion.

"It was only a trap, then?" gasped Brichet again, in terror.

"No, no, between scoundrels like us two there is no deception. 'Honor among thieves,' you know, old boy! There are still two hours of darkness before you. We 'll go halves, and then you can be off."

The old man quickly unbuttoned his vest, drew out the pocketbook, and throwing it on the table, growled :

" Better take half the money than be strangled."

South Sea shares, bonds of the East India Company, bank bills, Canadian debentures and all kinds of securities then at a premium, fell from the pocketbook, which flew open as Brichet violently flung it down. From these papers De Lozeril selected one of quite another kind.

" What is this ?" he asked.

" When Monsieur Bandinau gave me back all the money, he also brought me my will executed in Aurore's favor," replied Brichet.

" What ! Annibal's daughter ? And do you intend it to hold good, father-in-law ?" asked the chevalier.

A burst of laughter was Brichet's answer, and he added :

" Intend it to hold good ! You can do what you like with it."

" Then we shall burn it," said De Lozeril.

" Burn it," echoed the *procureur*, and at this moment, as we have said, Annibal arrived close to the two men, his rapier in his hand. He had come just in time to witness the burning of the document, and this done, the chevalier exclaimed greedily :

" Now for my half !"

Their two heads were bent eagerly over the treasure when an immense hand suddenly appeared, and the valuable documents on the table were seized in a firm grasp, while at the same time a voice said :

" Do you forget your friends when you go ' halves ?' "

Annibal's sudden apparition affected the two men very differently. For De Lozeril he was a formidable enemy ; for Brichet he was salvation in the hour of peril. It is true that Brichet, in invoking the captain's

protection, was like a man throwing himself into the water to escape the flames. To avoid being roasted to death he runs the risk of being drowned. But Brichet had no time to pause and reflect what the timely aid of the captain might ultimately cost him; all he thought of was his present deliverence from a man who was certain either to rob him of half his fortune or to strangle him. So with a wild cry of joy he sprang to his feet exclaiming:

"Ah, my good Fouquier, protect me from this wretch who wishes to rob *us!*" The *us* was cleverly calculated, for it included Annibal, but he answered with a sneer:

"Oh, don't be afraid, friend Brichet, the chevalier and I are going to have a little conversation, and when it is over I don't think he will trouble you much more."

De Lozeril was unarmed, and one glance at the captain's giant frame told him how hopeless would be a hand-to-hand struggle between them. Letting the papers, which he still grasped, fall back on the table, Annibal said to the old man:

"Put these all back in your pocket-book while this gentleman and I converse about the expediency of snatching other people's chestnuts, and, turning to De Lozeril he continued, with a sneer: "I warned you they would burn your fingers."

The chevalier was a gambler to the tips of his nails. He was playing a game for very high stakes and he saw that game almost lost. But, like a fine player, he was ready to pay, and to pay with a smile on his lips. Throwing himself on a sofa, he looked his enemy in the face and said, with a laugh:

"Well, Fouquier, don't you think these same chestnuts might burn your fingers too, though they are a good deal less delicate than mine?"

"Are you speaking of my dear little hand, young man?" asked Annibal, calmly, spreading out his paw that looked like a shoulder of mutton.

"Damn it, captain, in this question of chestnuts it seems to me we are on pretty equal terms, and does it not occur to you that in coming to blows with me you would run as much risk as I do?"

The captain screwed up his mouth and assumed an air of extreme modesty.

"I am fond of running risks," he said, "and life is so short, my friend, that one should never postpone a pleasure till to-morrow."

"Come along, then, be it so," answered De Lozeril, rising with alacrity from the sofa.

"Bravo!" cried the delighted captain, "no need to drag you along by the ear," and hastily crossing the *salon*, he made straight for the door, and hurriedly unlocking it, he was just about to pass out, when he was arrested by an exclamation from the chevalier.

"Where are you going to take me, captain?"

"We shall be quite undisturbed out on the Quai de Bethune," said Annibal, turning back.

"But it is pitch-dark."

"Well, what if it is? We're not going to thread a needle, and it is light enough to see a man at the point of one's sword."

"But I must at least have my sword, and I left it up in your room. I took it off when I sat down to supper," replied De Lozeril.

"True, then let us go up," said Annibal, walking straight toward the secret staircase, followed by the chevalier.

He had just set his foot on the first step when De Lozeril tapped him on the shoulder and whispered:

"One word in our common interest."

"Go on," said the captain, puzzled.

"You and I are going to try to cut each other's throats for the possession of Brichet's millions, are we not?"

"Certainly."

"And should one of us be killed the other will have his hands free to seize on the fortune of the *procureur?*"

"Of course."

"Well, I think that it would be just as well not to leave Brichet behind us alone in this room, for the survivor will run a serious risk of finding the old man fled with all his millions. Believe me, Fouquier, I have good reason to be certain of this."

The captain was speechless with perplexity, and the two men stood there, silent and motionless in the semi-darkness. The eyes of both turned instinctively toward Brichet, who was busily employed locking up his treasure in the strong-box. Brichet had shown the utmost indifference during the foregoing scene, avarice having rendered him deaf and blind to his surroundings. He had been so eagerly counting and recounting his bonds and shares before returning them to the pocketbook, that one would have imagined he had totally forgotten the presence of the two adversaries.

"I have an idea," cried Annibal after a pause. "Let us go up to my room to fight and take him with us. The one who survives can come back here with him and do what he likes with the old idiot."

"Agreed!" cried De Lozeril, and Annibal approached Brichet, saying with a smile:

"My dear son-in-law, you have been so very kind in allowing me to receive a few friends this evening that I am anxious to give you a little pleasure in return."

"Oh, I 'm past the age for pleasure," responded Brichet with a sigh.

"Nonsense ! Come along, one can only live once, and gayety is good for the health. You are eaten up by melancholy, my dear fellow, because you never amuse yourself, and now I am going to give you the funniest amusement possible to imagine."

Brichet, extremely doubtful as to Annibal's intentions, replied uneasily :

"But what is this amusement ?"

"You will come upstairs with us and see us cut each other's throat."

"Oh !" cried Brichet, starting back with fright.

"Come, now, I see you are dying to accept, only you pretend to be shy and want a little persuasion. All right. I will follow your little whim and use gentle force as if you were a young lady," and the captain without more ado put his arm round Brichet's waist, and lifted him in the air as deftly as if he were a feather. On feeling himself in the giant's powerful grasp, the *procureur's* face assumed an expression of blank despair, but seeing how futile it would be to struggle he submitted with as good a grace as he could. Annibal walked to the secret stair and deposited him on the first step. "There," he said, "now you follow De Lozeril and I will bring up the rear." And thus secured between the two men, Brichet ascended without saying a word. Arrived in his chamber, Fouquier conducted the old man to an arm-chair placed in a corner and pushed him into his seat, pale and trembling in every limb. Aided by De Lozeril, the captain arranged the room for the combat. He passed into the supper-room to fetch the lighted candles from the table. The four "kind friends" were still lying on the floor, snoring lustily. "The sots !"

said Annibal, in disgust, pushing them one after another with his foot, and returning to his bedroom he left the door open, saying : "If one of them wakes up he can see the fun without the trouble of rising." Then suddenly, as if moved by some good impulse, he said : "Look here, De Lozeril, listen to me : I give you a last chance. Give up your pretensions and get out of the hotel."

But the chevalier was too near the acquisition of the longed-for millions to throw up the game now, and he only replied :

"On guard, captain."

"Very well, my dear fellow, since you will have it so," said the captain, coolly raising his sword.

At the first contact of the two weapons a smile appeared on Brichet's lips, and he ceased to tremble. At the same moment one of the guests suddenly raised his heavy head.

"Blest if they 're not fighting!" he hiccoughed. He would have followed the combat with his eyes, but overcome with sleep, he sank back again, without having observed Brichet, who was invisible from where he lay.

Meanwhile, something was happening downstairs. Colard, who was still on guard before his master's door, had heard the noise made by Annibal in turning the key and pushing aside the bolts. Then a dead silence and no one passed out.

"What can be going on in there?" asked Colard, anxiously. And, opening the door with great precaution, he entered the salon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Knowing this was indeed to be a death-struggle, each antagonist settled to his work with systematic *sang froid*, bringing all their available science to bear on the arduous task of "cutting each other's throats," as Annibal had so airily expressed it. Firmly set, and as tranquil as if he were at dinner, the captain stood, a tower of strength, watching earnestly to take advantage of the slightest flaw in the chevalier's tactics; while De Lozeril, profiting by the experience of three months ago, moderated the vivacity of his mode of attack and husbanded his strength.

All was hushed in the great house.

"Oh, ho, chevalier, I see you have been mixing water with your wine!" cried the captain, quick to appreciate the wise moderation of De Lozeril's style, formerly so furious.

"I have profited much by your lessons," replied the young man, and by way of emphasis he treated the giant to one of the thrusts learned from him in their preceding encounter.

"Very well done, very well, indeed!" pronounced the

captain in the quiet tone of a master encouraging his pupil. "But oh, my poor De Lozeril, what a pity it is that you will persist in this madness of yours and force me to finish you! Except for that, we should have been such good friends, and I would have made you a perfect swordsman."

"How can I help it, my dear Annibal, I have the misfortune of being obstinate," replied the young man, making another thrust.

Fouquier parried, and his sword, striking the chevalier's obliquely, whirled it from his grasp and it fell at the captain's feet. Annibal placed his foot on the weapon, and thus holding it said to his disarmed enemy:

"Come, you are a brave fellow, and before restoring your sword, I wish to give you one more chance for your life. Will you give way to me, or not?"

But the golden mirage of Brichet's millions rendered De Lozeril blind to the warnings of fate and deaf to the voice of reason. He shook his head, persistent in his resolve to continue the terribly unequal struggle. The captain raised his foot, releasing the sword, and with a shrug said, in a pitying tone:

"Come on, obstinate fellow. I see I must kill you in order to teach you common sense. Now for it."

At the outset Brichet had remained quietly in his chair, but as the combat advanced he had risen as if fascinated by the clashing of the naked weapons, and drawing nearer and nearer, now watched the fight with absorbing eagerness. Singular revelation, that this man, whose character, pursuits and profession ought to have made him essentially a man of peace, seemed perfectly conversant with every move in the terrible game. At every thrust and parry, following each other in fearfully rapid succession, he had testified his

ardent approval or his dissatisfaction by the most eloquent gestures, while his whole frame seemed consumed with impatience at his enforced inactivity, during a scene apparently so full of fascination for him. When De Lozeril had been disarmed Brichet had remarked contemptuously, "No match for the other!" and a frown had gathered on his brow when the captain had once more offered him his life, but on the chevalier's refusal of the concession, the smile returned to his lips, and he cried :

" Play out the game !"

De Lozeril now seemed to forget his former prudence which had prompted him to avoid a useless waste of strength.

" Ah, now you are going back to your first style, chevalier," sneered the captain, who in response to all the aggressive bounds of De Lozeril to right and to left, stood still, merely pivoting on his heel. By thus changing from place to place, it happened at last that De Lozeril found himself directly in front of Brichet, who held himself flat against the wall. The chevalier felt his strength giving way, his arm was heavy, and the blood surged to his temples, which seemed about to burst. A moment more and he would no longer be able to defend himself. Death stared him in the face. But now at his back, very low but distinct for him alone, the voice of Brichet whispered swiftly :

" I will help you to kill the captain and you will help me to get off with my money. If you accept, work round to the right and bring Annibal in front of me."

The last word was hardly spoken when De Lozeril sprang to the right.

" What the deuce are you up to now, making me spin round like a top," said Annibal, changing place according to his adversary's movements, and thus the

two men reversed their positions and it was now Fouquier whose back almost touched Brichet. At the captain's right De Lozeril beheld the pale face of Brichet signing eagerly to him to run his adversary through. The chevalier, gathering all his remaining strength, made a tremendous thrust in the direction of his heart. Annibal saw the coming blow, and would have raised his sword to parry it, but at that moment his right arm was caught as in a vise and held by Brichet's two hands, and the chevalier's steel was buried in his breast.

"Good God!" groaned Annibal. He could say no more, for a flow of blood stopped his utterance. Compressing his frightful wound with desperate energy, Annibal turned quickly round, hoping still to revenge himself on the cowardly traitor who had thus delivered him to his enemy; but Brichet had fled for safety to the other end of the room. The captain, feeling himself lost, summoned together his fast-failing strength, and inspired with a wild desire for vengeance, staggered toward the corner where crouched the terrified *procureur*, but he had scarcely taken a step when his limbs gave way, and he fell heavily to the ground. Even then he tried to drag himself toward the culprit, but, overcome by weakness, he sank helpless in his agony. But still, in this heart, that was gradually ceasing to beat, burned the one pure sentiment which a life of infamy had never been able to quench—love for his daughter—and he murmured gently: "Adieu, my dear little girl." And with a last dying effort wafted a kiss to the only being he had ever loved.

Terrified at the murder he had just committed, De Lozeril seemed deprived of his senses, but he was recalled to himself on hearing Brichet say: "He is dead." Despite his villainy, the chevalier's very soul

revolted at the horrible tragedy, and he longed to escape from the scene and from the wretch who had aided him.

"Come, you villain!" he cried, in feverish trepidation. "Give me my share of the money and then be off!"

But the crafty Brichet had imperceptibly glided toward the secret door, where he now stationed himself, sword in hand.

"*Your* share, indeed!" he cried, with an evil smile.

The young man shuddered as he looked at him, for instead of the good-natured, placid countenance of the *procureur*, he beheld once more a face transformed to the semblance of some wild animal, so fierce, so cruel, so hideous was its expression!

"And do you know why I helped you to put the captain out of the way? It was only because I was obliged to kill one of you that I might be sole possessor of my fortune. As soon as I saw you fighting I understood at once that you were the weaker, and that having got rid of Fouquier, I could easily manage you. For the last two hours you have kept me without arms, and I have been obliged to submit, but now I have a weapon, and I will show you that I know how to use it!"

"Put down that sword, old man, you are mad!" cried the chevalier, and he tried to force his way past him, but Brichet, presenting the point of the sword to his face, said quietly:

"You shall fight, my fine friend, unless you want me to kill you like a dog!"

"Let me pass!" insisted the chevalier, with rising anger, and he advanced a step or two.

Brichet, with the sword which he still held extended, gave him a cut on the cheek, drawing the blood.

"There! Take that for a first warning," said the *procuréur*, coolly.

The young man did not wait for a second. Blind with fury, he sprang backward, to give himself a fair field with his enemy, and drawing his sword, met the blade of the *procureur's*. At his first onslaught the chevalier was endowed with the superhuman strength of violent anger, but it very soon came home to him that the preceding encounter had greatly weakened his forces, and although Brichet had not the strength of Annibal, still he found him a most formidable adversary. Brichet showed a vigor and an agility absolutely incredible, as he stood facing his enemy, well set up, his eye bright, his head steady—a master of the art.

"This man has handled the foils for years," thought De Lozeril, alarmed at his proficiency, while Brichet continued to thrust and parry with amazing skill, uttering little shrieks of fierce satisfaction and crying:

"Ah, the good old times! I believed I had grown rusty; but no, I am just as good as ever."

All at once he stopped his soliloquizing and said to De Lozeril:

"Now, chevalier, look out for this favorite thrust of mine that is coming. It has never failed to give me my man, and I verily believe it will send you to keep company with the captain."

Then followed a succession of rapid, brilliant feints, the two blades flashing and gleaming in the semi-darkness. One moment of intense, agonizing excitement, and then the sword of the *procureur* disappeared in the chevalier's breast, piercing him through and through, and protruding at the back, between the shoulders.

After terminating the hideous struggle, without

even given himself time to draw his weapon from the wound, the cunning Brichet made a spring backward, putting himself beyond the reach of De Lozeril, who, he feared, might gather his dying energies and deal him a last desperate blow. But the precaution was useless. On receiving his mortal wound De Lozeril's sword fell from his grasp; for a moment he beat the air convulsively with his hands, then, uttering some inarticulate words, he fell headlong to the ground, dragging with him the rapier, sticking in his wound. Brichet looked at him with perfect calmness, lying there close to Annibal.

"He fought like a little schoolboy," he said; "and I did well to choose him, for that other great brute would certainly have got the best of me."

Although the scenes just described occupied long in the telling, in reality but a very short time had elapsed, and now, in the silence of the night the great clock on St. Louis's Church rang out half-past five o'clock. The *procureur* stood motionless, counting the strokes, then ran to the window and looked out eagerly on the deserted *quai*. The black horizon shows a faint streak of pale light.

"Good God, the day is dawning! I must be off," he cried. "The house is still quiet; but a little more, and it will be all astir."

Descending the staircase he reached the *salon*. There he breathed a loud sigh of relief, for the worthy man was well pleased with his night's work. Was he not forever rid of the two importunate claimants to his fortune? Had he not thus earned the right of possessing it in peaceful security? Wild with joy he ran toward his strong-box and once more drew forth the beloved pocketbook, lavishing on it the most frantic caresses.

"Oh, my money! My love! My sweetheart! You are mine again—my very own—without any danger of loss!" he cried, and with a sinister look at the ceiling he added: "Yes, come down now, you two, if you can! You who wanted a bit of my precious treasure!" and he pressed the pocketbook to his heart with fierce delight. Suddenly he laughed out savagely. "Yes, and a few minutes ago De Lozeril was forcing me to give him over the half! There—on this very table—and there is the Kirsch, so good says Master de Lozeril, that it would bring a dead man to life. Ha, ha, my pretty boy, would you like to try it now?" He took the glass in his hand, and holding it on a level with his eyes, continued: "You poured me out good measure, I see. Scoundrel, nearly half the bottle, and you thought you would get me to swallow it, and that it would go to my head. Idiot! As if that wretched drop would be enough to knock me over if I had chosen to drink it," and he passed the glass to and fro beneath his nostrils, in ecstatic enjoyment of the liquor's aroma. "Dear chevalier," he murmured, "you little guessed you were pouring me out a stirrup cup!" and raising the glass to his lips he drank slowly like a true gourmet, his eyes closed in tranquil delight. But when, after swallowing the last drop, his head still thrown back in the act of drinking, he opened his eyes, an apparition fell on his horrified gaze, and the glass fell from his trembling hand to the ground with a loud crash. Before him stood Colard, pale, silent and somber. Seized by a guilty terror, his face convulsed, his haggard eyes staring wildly, Brichet staggered backward, extending his trembling hands and gasping out:

"Have *you* come to kill me?"

Colard shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"What would be the need?" he said, casting a sig-

nificant and sinister smile on the fragments of broken glass at his feet, revealing to Brichet the horrible truth.

"I am lost! Oh, my God!" he groaned out, frantic with despair and terror. "That Kirsch was poisoned, was it not?"

Crazy with fear, he threw himself on the ground, crawling abjectly to Colard's feet, who stood there cold and immovable. In an agony of fright Brichet clasped his knees and covered his hands with kisses, at the same time calling wildly on the attendant to save him.

"What would be the good?" asked the imperturbable Colard, standing there with calm face and folded arms, the image of retribution. Brichet sprang toward the pocketbock, and handing it to the attendant, sobbed in earnest supplication:

"Take back the fortune, but in Heaven's name, save my life!"

And once more he sank down on the ground, overcome by agitation, his trembling limbs giving way beneath him. But Colard took not the slightest notice, and remained buried in thought. Suddenly his face lightened up with a smile, and laying his hand on Brichet's shoulder, he said:

"Listen to me: You have but one hour to live, unless I consent to save you."

The *procureur* sprang to his feet with a wild cry.

"Ah! You say that you can save me! Mercy! Mercy!" he shrieked. "Spare my life, Colard! Oh, I will be your slave! I will obey you abjectly!" cried the miserable wretch, a desperate hope shining in his haggard eyes. But Colard shook his head:

"You promised that before, and you know how you

kept your word. How have you fulfilled your engagements?"

"I will fulfill them all now, every one if you wish, only save me!" he answered eagerly.

"Do it at once then," said Colard, curtly, and he pointed to a chair before the table, saying: "Sit down there."

Humbly and abjectly Brichet rose from the ground and sat down in the chair, saying, in a trembling voice:

"You won't deceive me, Colard? I may count on your word, may I not? If I do what you demand, you will give me my life? You have an antidote to the poison. Show it to me, good Colard!"

In answer the attendant drew from his pocket a small vial. On seeing this, Brichet gathered himself together and sprang at the old man as if to snatch the bottle from his hand, but he stopped suddenly at sight of a long, formidable knife held by Colard, and, mad with impotent rage, he flung himself into the chair. Taking no notice of this ineffectual attempt at revolt, the old servant spoke in a voice of solemn warning:

"Obey, before the first pangs of torture begin to rack you, for after that I can do nothing for you."

"Give your orders!" cried Brichet, eagerly.

Colard walked toward a table, whence he took writing materials, and passing by the sideboard, he fetched a glass, placing all together before the *procureur*.

"First of all," he said, "you will give me back the will you made in Mme. Brichet's favor."

"I haven't got it," stammered Brichet.

Colard looked steadily at him, suspecting that he lied.

"I swear it," he continued earnestly. "It was

burned this very night—truly. See, there are the ashes lying in the hearth!" whined the poor wretch.

"It matters little after all," answered Colard, with a shrug; "a later will annuls that one," and laying a sheet of paper before the *procureur*, he ordered:

"Begin by showing me a specimen of the writing I told you to practice."

And Brichet wrote, with a feverish hand, two lines and submitted them to the valet.

"Is that all right?" he inquired in an abject tone.

"Yes, that will do," was the reply after Colard had carefully examined the paper. "Now, write on another sheet what I tell you." And he held the writing to the candle and set fire to it.

Brichet took the pen, but suddenly laying it on the table, he said:

"If you would just pour out the antidote into this glass I would write with an easy mind."

Instead of answering Colard rose and walked toward the door. On seeing this Brichet, once more crazy with terror, shrieked:

"Stay, stay, for God's sake don't leave me. I will write anything you wish, my good Colard. You know I trust you."

"Write," said Colard coldy, and Brichet, bending assiduously over the paper, wrote, at the valet's dictation, as follows:

"This day, in full possession of my faculties, I write here the alterations I desire to make in my last will and testament. With the exception of one half million and my hotel, which I leave to my wife, Aurore Fouquier, I give and bequeath my entire fortune to my beloved daughter, Pauline Brichet, and if the wishes of a departed father have any influence over her, I

"I WILL BE YOUR WITNESS."—*See Page* 312.

further desire that she shall choose for her husband Doctor Maurice Gardi."

"Now sign and date it the fourth of last month, the night before your fit."

Brichet wrote his name with a splendid flourish and handed the paper to the attendant. Colard examined it, line by line, and, apparently satisfied with the result, he folded it and placed it in the pocketbook containing the millions. Brichet had now left the table, and holding out the glass with a trembling hand, he almost screamed, in his agitation :

"Pour, pour, pour !"

Colard uncorked the little vial deliberately, and, with a steady hand, emptied half its contents into the glass. At a gulp Brichet swallowed the liquid. Then rushing at Colard with furious menace in his eyes, he shrieked :

"Ah, now—now that I am beyond all danger, we shall settle accounts, you and I !"

But Colard remained immovable. Looking calmly at Brichet he laughed aloud a bitter, mocking laugh of gratified hatred.

"Fool," he said quietly, "the Kirsch was perfectly innocent, and you have just swallowed the real poison. Die, like a dog ; I have no more need of you!"

He had scarcely ceased to speak when Brichet, without uttering a cry, fell dead at his feet.

CHAPTER XXV.

Evidently fate had decreed that the name of Brichet should furnish unceasing matter of discussion to the gossip-loving Parisians, for now, a third time, it was repeated in every quarter of the town, and the tragedy was the one topic of the day. Those who were really well-informed, who "had it from the very best authority," maintained that during a supper in the hotel Brichet's father-in-law and his future son-in-law, coming to high words, had fought with such desperate fury that the fray had ended in the same manner as that of the celebrated Kilkenny cats. Four guests who had assisted at the repast related how impossible it had been for them to prevail on the combatants to desist, despite their most urgent entreaties. The origin of the quarrel, they said, had occurred long before that evening, and was certainly not to be attributed to the effects of wine; after having vainly tried to succor the wounded, who had expired in their faithful arms, these sympathetic and tender-hearted friends had passed the remainder of the night in silent grief.

But another terrible event of the same night had thrown a still heavier gloom over the afflicted house-

hold, for it appeared the good, amiable and beloved *procureur* had succumbed to a second fit of apoplexy. It was said that his valet, Colard, having as usual entered his master's room in the morning, had found the old gentleman stretched on the floor, cold and dead. It was surmised that the worthy *procureur*, feeling himself in danger of another fit, had jumped from his bed to call for help. Some wiser individuals declared that this second attack had been caused by drunkenness, for the shameful truth was out, despite all the efforts of the faithful Colard to conceal it. They went so far as to state that the valet had found his master lying in the midst of a heap of empty bottles, and the doctor, Gardi, summoned too late, could only certify that death had been caused by intoxication. Such was the explanation of the tragedy that went forth to the public. Nothing could have been more logical.

Colard had so arranged that it was impossible to doubt the fact. The attendant had undressed the body, that it might appear that Brichet had hastily jumped out of bed. He had disarranged the bed-clothes ; on the table, beside the half-empty bottle of Kirsch, he had placed more empty bottles.

Excepting the poor captain, who could now tell no tales, no one in existence was aware that Colard had been passing a sleepless night. The attendant was fully cognizant of the duel. When he had entered the *procureur's* deserted apartments it was his first thought that Brichet had mounted by the secret stair to the captain's room. He, too, ascended, and standing on the upper steps, had heard all that had passed ; that is, he knew that De Lozeril had slain Annibal, and that in his turn he had been killed by Brichet.

It was scarcely broad daylight when one of the servants in a terrible fright came knocking at his door.

"Monsieur Colard," he said, "the four friends of the captain are just going away, and oh, sir, they say that last night the captain and Monsieur de Lozeril fought, and they are both lying there dead, sir."

At these words Colard started with horror and surprise, while he answered :

"Do not allow any one to enter the room, but run at once for Monsieur de Badieres, and as you go out tell the other servants to be sure not to make a noise and wake Monsieur Brichet. It will be quite time enough to tell him the awful news when he gets up."

A half-hour later the judge arrived at the hotel, and Colard showed him to the captain's room. One glance at the two bodies was sufficient.

"They have run each other through," he said. After making the necessary notes and observations the magistrate turned to Colard and asked : "Does Brichet know of this ?"

"No, sir, I have not dared tell him yet. I thought sir, if you would be so kind as to break it to him, you would do it so much better than I."

"Very well, Colard."

"Then, sir, I will go and awake him and say you wish to speak to him."

"Do so, and I will undertake the rest."

Two minutes later Colard emerged from Brichet's room terribly agitated and trembling in every limb, and meeting the lackey François, he cried :

"Quick, quick, run for Doctor Gardi, there may still be hope, and after that go as fast as you can for the notary."

"What in Heaven's name is the matter ?" asked the judge in consternation at hearing these orders.

"Ah, Monsieur de Badieres, what an awful catastrophe !" stammered Colard, and unable to articulate

another word, he drew the judge toward the room where lay the body of Brichet, among the *débris* of empty bottles. In a few moments they were joined by the doctor, who cried, pointing to the bottles :

" Ah, the wretched man, he has been drinking again, although I warned him it would be his death."

At first sight the face of the corpse exhibited every sign of apoplexy ; but after a closer inspection a doubt arose in the doctor's mind. Strangely surprised, he bent eagerly over the dead man and forced open the jaws. The mouth and tongue were black and strongly corroded.

" Ah," he said to himself, " I see that Master Colard sometimes pretends to break vials without breaking them."

" A fit of apoplexy, I suppose, doctor," said M. de Badieres, deeply afflicted at the death of his old friend.

Despite the horrible discovery he had just made, Maurice nodded assent and quickly reclosed the mouth of the dead, that the tongue might not be visible ; but his eyes fell on Colard, and he could not but observe the look of intense relief on the attendant's face at his reply to the judge.

" This man is a poisoner," he thought, " and he imagines I have not discovered the truth."

At this moment the door opened and M. Bandinau entered. The good notary had forgotten his quarrel with Brichet, all rancor having been absorbed in his grief for the friend of his youth.

" Monsieur Bandinau," said Colard, " the whole of my late master's fortune is in that strong-box. Will you take charge of it ?"

" The ruffian has doubtless stolen half of it," thought Maurice ; and he had scarcely expressed the thought in his own mind than Colard, opening the strong-box,

drew forth the famous pocketbook and handed it to the notary.

"Count, if you please, sir," he said; and M. Bandinau, with a practiced hand, hastily turned over the contents.

"It is quite correct," he remarked in a few moments, to Gardi's great surprise.

"What could have been his motive," he thought. Colard's next words gave him a clue to the mystery.

"My master told me, sir, that he had made another will, and it ought to be among these papers."

"Ah, I see," thought Maurice, "he has left you a thundering legacy, Master Colard;" but M. Bandinau, having hastily read the document, forthwith demolished this theory by saying:

"Ah, my poor Colard, it is you who are the loser this time, for in the first will there was a good pension left to you, and in this one you are not even mentioned."

"Never mind that, sir, Mademoiselle Pauline's happiness will make up everything to me. Show M. Gardi, please, sir, the clause about him."

M. Bandinau held out the will to Maurice, and the young man, speechless with joy, looked Colard in the face.

"It is inexplicable," he thought, seeing the look of sincere satisfaction on the old man's countenance.

After giving orders that the chevalier's body should be carried to his own home, M. De Badieres had promptly proceeded with the arrangements for the burial of poor Annibal. The funeral of Brichet was not to take place until the following day, his influential position making it necessary to give due notice to his many former friends.

Despite the laxity of his conduct Aurore had dearly

loved her father, and followed his remains to their last home with deep sorrow in her gentle heart. On returning from the sad ceremony M. de Badieres, on whose arm the poor girl leaned, wishing to shed a ray of sunshine on her desolation, said :

" The death of De Lozeril will now make it easy for Monsieur de Cambiac to be forgotten, and he will be allowed to escape quietly to a foreign land," and Aurore, overcome with happiness, murmured :

" I am a widow now, free to love him. I shall share his exile."

Twenty-four hours after the modest funeral of the captain, Brichet was borne to the tomb, followed by an immense procession of mourners. At the moment the *cortége* left the hotel, Colard, unable to endure his crushing grief, had fainted away, so that this model serving man had to be left at home alone with his sorrow. The procession fairly started, Colard suddenly regained possession of his senses, and proceeding to his late master's room, sat himself down in Brichet's arm-chair, listening with intense satisfaction to the tolling of the bell at the Church of St. Louis. The hotel being but a stone's throw from the church, Colard could hear the chanted mass distinctly, and followed with an attentive ear every part of the funeral service. Although he felt absolutely certain that his crime was undetected, still he was anxious that the body should be put away quite out of sight, and he admitted to himself that he would not be quite at his ease until all evidence of his crime should be hermetically sealed up forever in the private vault of St. Louis's Church.

" One hour more and I shall have nothing to fear, and to all the multitude praying in that church, Brichet will be dead as Julius Cæsar."

Presently a tremendous clashing and clanging of bells announced that the ceremony was at an end, and the *procureur* about to be laid in his last resting-place. At this dismal announcement Colard rose to his feet, trembling with emotion, and with a burst of triumphant joy he exclaimed :

"At last, I have gained my end !"

The words were scarcely spoken, when behind him, coming he knew not whence, a terrible voice smote upon his ear.

"Murderer !" was the single word it pronounced.

The guilty man turned, and at the awful sight that met his gaze, speechless with horror, his face convulsed by an agony of fright, retreating farther and farther back, with seared and trembling hands held before his eyes, seeking to shut out the ghastly vision, Colard, in a real faint, fell heavily to the ground.

CHAPTER XXVI.

We must now revert to a page of history forty years previous to the execution of Cartouche, and give some particulars of a great personage whom we have already mentioned casually.

On the 5th of March, 1678, an immense crowd was assembled on the *quai* at Toulon.

Every eye was eagerly turned toward the bay, watching the approach of a magnificent galley, the *Reale de France*, bringing back to his native country, after a three years' absence, no less a personage than Louis Victor de Rochechouret, Duc de Montmartre et de Vivonne, Lord High Admiral of the fleets of France and Viceroy of Sicily, commonly called "*Le gros Creve.*"

A most remarkable man was this Duke de Vivonne.

About forty years of age, his corpulence was already so developed as to be a favorite subject of raillery and witticism at the court. These witticisms, however, were usually perpetrated at a pretty safe distance, for the duke was as irascible as he was brave, and next to eating and sleeping, there was no pleasure for him equal to that of fighting. Save these three engrossing occupations, life held no enjoyment for him ; in fact,

his laziness was such that he had once allowed two whole months to elapse before writing to the king the announcement of an important victory.

To protect him from the well-deserved royal displeasure, the duke had an able advocate in the person of his sister, the fascinating Mme. de Montespan, who for fourteen years had been the sunshine of the great Louis Quatorze.

But the duke himself deplored such protection, even in his direst necessity, and when matters became too serious for even his careless spirit, he would travel post-haste to Versailles, remain in the royal presence just long enough to convulse the king with laughter and then go his way, invariably receiving from his sovereign some new title or honor instead of the censure he so justly merited.

Assured of the royal favor, the duke would indulge in the most eccentric whims, and it was on record that at Messina he had caused the senate, the clergy and the entire populace to wait five mortal hours, on the occasion of his formal inauguration as viceroy, till he had ended his dinner.

To return to the royal galley, which by this time had arrived at its destination and now dropped anchor in the bay.

In the present day the words "galley-slaves" and "condemned to the galleys" have ceased to have any real significance, but in bygone times the galley occupied the place now filled by the ships of the royal fleet. Propelled by enormous oars, the crew was furnished exclusively by the convict prisons.

From time to time the gates of the convict prisons opened to send forth new recruits, death and disease making terrible havoc in the ranks of the galley slaves, whose only protection from the summer sun

and the winter rain was but a piece of sail cloth stretched overhead.

And thus the unhappy creatures lived, labored, slept and suffered, hopeless and in chains, and it may well be imagined, despite the severity of punishment they risked in case of recapture, how the dream of liberty haunted their forlorn and miserable lives.

And this was the reason that the Royal Galley, instead of advancing to land, had dropped anchor just in the entrance of the bay and almost out at sea.

But the precaution had been useless, for the following morning, when the duke was still seated at breakfast, the overseer waited on him with the announcement that a man had escaped.

"Well," replied the duke, "if he should not be brought back during the day you must apply to the foreman of Toulon prison for a convict to replace him."

"Ah, your highness, that will, indeed, be difficult, for he was one of the very flower of our crew, a splendid young fellow! An arm of iron! I chose him myself at Messina on his arrival from France. He was an exceptionally fine fellow, only eighteen years of age, and having already assassinated two persons."

But the duke paid little attention to the regrets of his overseer, all his thoughts being occupied by his approaching return to Versailles, after an absence of three years. He merely directed the post of the fugitive to be filled by another prisoner.

As the overseer was leaving the room, however, his eyes fell on a boat rapidly approaching the galley.

"Ah, your highness," he cried gayly, "it will be unnecessary for me to visit the governor of the prison, for, if I am not mistaken, here is my man, safe and sound!"

"Then go and secure him and pay the reward," ordered the duke.

"I will, your highness, and I must further give the necessary orders to prepare for our little ceremony," replied the man, bowing and withdrawing.

This "little ceremony" so cheerfully alluded to was in reality a most frightful penalty.

Every recaptured convict was first brought before the commandant of the galley; then, on the overseer's swearing that he was a fugitive from the ranks of the galley slaves, he was led back to his deserted place, where the blacksmith awaited him, for the purpose of riveting to his ankle a weight three times as heavy as the one he had borne before his escape. This done, the wretched creature's ears and nose were cut off, and the wounds were cauterized with a hot iron. The victim's convulsive writhings under the horrible torture frequently caused fatal injuries to the eyes as well.

After this cruel operation, the unfortunate prisoner was allowed but three hours respite before being compelled to return to the labor of the oar.

The overseer soon reappeared with the fugitive.

Of middle height and perfectly formed, the young galley slave seemed the embodiment of strength, cunning and audacity as he followed the overseer with a careless and defiant air.

The duke was at that moment engaged in absorbing the contents of an immense goblet of iced water, the invariable termination of his copious repasts.

On the entrance of the two men his eyes fell on the young fugitive, at whose appearance the duke was so startled and amazed that he remained with the half-empty goblet in his hands, staring at him in open-mouthed astonishment.

"By Sardanapalus," he exclaimed in an undertone, "where have I seen that face?"

The overseer waited in respectful silence until his highness should finish his goblet of water.

But the duke seemed to be in no hurry, and in this eccentric position continued to make his reflections.

"No," he thought, "I cannot possibly ever have seen this creature before, but there is certainly some old acquaintance of mine whom the scoundrel resembles in the most remarkable manner." And still the duke remained in thought, his elbows in the air.

"Can he be going to swallow the goblet as well as the water?" thought the officer, maintaining a respectful silence, a silence that was broken by a loud peal of laughter, revealing the splendid white teeth of the audacious young galley-slave.

The overseer grew pale, and trembled at this unheard-of act of daring, fearing an explosion of anger from the irascible duke, which would, in a measure, fall on him as well as the offender. To his great relief, his highness, calmly depositing the empty goblet on the table, merely exclaimed, in the satisfied tone of a man who suddenly recalls a long-forgotten fact:

"I have it! Yes, I know now whom he is the very living image of—it is Dame Brichet in her youthful days."

The officer had still further astonishment in store for him, for the duke, who had never been known to bestow even a look on one of the galley-slaves, now turned to the young man and asked him, with evident curiosity:

"How old are you?"

"I am eighteen."

"What is your name?"

"Monday."

"What?" asked the duke, imagining he had not heard correctly.

"My name is Monday. It was given to me by the people who brought me up, because it was on a Monday they picked me out of a ditch where I had been thrown, somewhere about Chartres."

"And what has become of these people?" inquired the duke, with lively interest.

"Dead!" replied the slave, in a hoarse voice.

"Pardon me, your highness, if I offer a word of explanation," here interposed the officer. "It is for the murder of these two benefactors that he has just been condemned to the galleys for forty years."

"Is that true?" asked the duke.

"They beat me," replied the young man, in a tone of bitter resentment.

"In escaping you knew the punishment you laid yourself open to if recaptured?"

"Yes, I knew; but it was worth risking something to get away from the slow torture of the galleys. Always groaning, always suffering. No hope, never an hour of recreation!"

"Oh, the ingratitude of the creature!" exclaimed the indignant overseer, aside. "Never an hour of recreation, indeed; and I who gave him for his neighbor the merriest companion in the whole galley—an old fencing-master of Navailles, who was sent to us for having killed his captain. To say that he never has any recreation, when the whole night long, instead of sleeping, I allow them to amuse themselves fencing with two bits of stick that they got somehow. Oh, the ungrateful wretch!" But the officer might have spared his eloquence; not one word did his highness hear, being once more buried in reverie, his eyes fixed earnestly on the young man.

"Can it be he?—eighteen years—yes! and the wonderful likeness! The boy is evidently an atrocious ruffian, but would he have become such if I had not interfered with his existence? Is it not I who have been the involuntary means of pushing the wretched creature toward the galleys?" And M. De Vivonne again asked himself, "Can it be he?"

As for the overseer, he could only imagine that the whole scene was a dream. That a miserable galley slave should have dared laugh in the august presence of the lord high admiral, and that this worm should not only be still alive but actually in conversation with his highness himself! No, no! It was more than any mortal could believe.

"Monday," it must be said, was himself vastly astonished at the duke's condescension on his behalf, but being a philosophical young person, he evinced no sign of emotion, awaiting M. De Vivonne's next question.

"What was the occupation of the people who took you from the ditch?"

"They were poor acrobats, without house or home, and begging through all the south of France."

"Why did they not go to the north, toward Paris?" asked the duke, who had listened to the boy's last words with eager curiosity.

"Oh, oh," answered Monday, with a meaning smile, "they seemed so very much afraid of Paris that I always thought they must have had some disagreement with the police there."

"So you have never been to Paris?"

"Never."

M. De Vivonne strangled a little sigh of relief, and proceeded:

"And you never tried to find out who your parents were?"

"What would have been the good?" responded Monday, with a shrug. "They must have had some motive to throw me into a ditch, and I don't imagine it could have been too much affection. And then what should I have done in a family, among people who would have wished to keep me in order, I who was resolved to be my own master. Why, the very day that my adopted parents tried to draw the strings a little too tight, I laid them dead on the ground before me."

The cool effrontery with which Monday thus referred to his shocking crime sent a shudder quivering through the huge frame of M. de Vivonne, as he thought:

"A nice present this creature would be to send his poor mother. No—much better keep him in the service of his majesty."

Nevertheless, there had awakened in the duke's heart some shadow of remorse, which pleaded faintly for mercy for the culprit.

"Officer, you will take this man back to his place and see that he is more securely chained than before."

"Yes, your highness, and I shall give the order for our usual little ceremony?"

"No, you will not," replied the duke dryly. "I make Monday the present of his nose and ears."

The overseer gasped with astonishment at this unheard-of clemency, and despite his servility, he could not repress a remonstrance:

"But, your highness, have you reflected that you are encouraging this man to try a second escape?"

"Your duty is to prevent such an occurrence," replied the duke, curtly, "and I authorize you to tell the two neighbors of this man that, should he effect his escape, it is they who will pay the penalty with their ears and noses for not having prevented it."

This amendment seemed agreeable to the overseer, who further demanded :

"And does your highness authorize me to publish this new rule on board the galley ?"

"What rule ?"

"Making each man responsible for the escape of his neighbor."

"Certainly not, idiot ! I only intended it to apply to Monday, whom I wish to remain on board my galley. Now take him away and do as I tell you," ordered M. de Vivonne.

The puzzled officer retired, dragging Monday after him, wondering, if the duke wished to retain the young man on board, why he did not do so by the simplest means, namely, the cutting of his nose and ears.

As for Monday himself, sullen and silent, he sat chained to the seat, which he had hoped never more to behold, seeking vainly why M. de Vivonne had so mercifully spared him the dreaded punishment, and at the same time wondering why he should thus have sought to render all future escape impossible.

An hour later the barge was in readiness to convey the duke to the shore, but before leaving the galley, his highness summoned the overseer.

"Is Monday back in his place ?" he inquired.

"Yes, your highness, and his new chain is three times heavier than his former one, and I have warned his neighbors what the consequences of his flight will be to them."

"Good !" replied the duke, and the anxious overseer continued :

"But if, in spite of the apparent impossibility, he should get away, may I follow the usual routine and hang him if he is retaken ?"

"No, you may not. You will simply chain him to

his seat as before. I wish to find him there on my return," and so saying the *Gros Creve* descended with the precaution his obesity demanded and took his place in the barge, leaving the overseer to his mystified reflections.

"It must be one of his own relatives," was the conclusion of that worthy.

As for the duke, his thoughts, too, dwelt on the wretched boy who had so strangely recalled long-forgotten scenes.

"Perhaps I am the primary cause of the young ruffian's depravity," he thought; "but, anyhow, I have done what I could for him—all any one could do for such a scoundrel!"

During the fourteen days consumed in the journey to Versailles, the thought of the galley-slave frequently recurred to his languid mind, and once he was even tempted to laugh aloud, as he murmured:

"Strange freak of destiny! This boy, who for a moment seemed destined for the brilliant career of a prince, will, doubtless, rot and die at the galleys."

But fate decreed that the duke should never return to his galley.

After a few years of wild dissipation at the court of Versailles, he succumbed to a violent attack of indigestion, having long forgotten the very existence of the unhappy man who dragged out his now doubly weary life, full of sullen rage and silent suffering.

For the career of the wretched Monday had become one of the most utter misery, hated, as he was, by the whole galley.

The very fact of his having preserved intact his nose and ears had engendered a bitter enmity among these outcasts, and when it further transpired that his

neighbors were to be the sufferers should he succeed in escaping, their resentment knew no bounds.

Among his companions Monday went by the nickname of "M. de Vivonne's pet." To the overseer he was "the relative of his highness." He encouraged the evil dispositions of the crew toward the miserable Monday, knowing that he was thus doubly secured against any further attempt at escape. Despite all precautions, however, the energy of the convict remained unabated, and three times he succeeded in escaping the vigilance of his tormentors; in each case, with the same futile result, for he was recaptured, and his neighbors paid the penalty of his hardihood.

Years passed slowly on, and Monday's former companions had, one by one, succumbed to disease or been killed in action, but he still lived on and suffered—his persecution being bequeathed as a legacy by one set of galley-slaves to another. The overseer himself was his bitterest enemy, especially since the death of M. de Vivonne had put an end to the hope he had once entertained of receiving some day a handsome gratuity on account of the "relative."

And thus thirty-seven long years had elapsed since the sunny March morning when M. de Vivonne had driven away in his carriage to Versailles. The boy of eighteen was now almost an old man, but as all things come to him who waits, the day of deliverance dawned at last even for poor Monday.

During an action in which the galley took part, off the coast of Sardinia, the same cannon-ball shattered his chain and also carried off the head of the overseer.

Monday promptly seized the opportunity. Amidst the smoke and tumult of the battle he jumped overboard, and managed, after many adventures, to reach Paris. He was now fifty-five years of age.

Through fatal magnetism that irresistibly draws one scoundrel toward another, it was not long before Monday was enrolled as one of the most active members of Cartouche's gang. In his capacity of "pioneer" it was his duty to scent out profitable expeditions and to lay the plan for their successful execution.

The house of a tinsmith, in the Rue de la Bucherie, was his place of retreat, and there Cartouche visited him from time to time.

It was at the first of these interviews that the brigand discovered his new associate in his natural condition, without the wig, blue spectacles and false coloring which he invariably wore to elude the police.

Cartouche, on seeing him thus changed, was utterly dumfounded.

"What," he cried, "is it you—the *procureur?*" and then it seemed as if he would expire with laughter at the acuteness of his joke. "Well," he continued, "this is really too good to be true, and I who seriously believed you to be an escaped galley-slave! To think of one of my band being a *procureur!* And you know, old fellow, the whole town is looking for you. There is nothing else talked of but your mysterious disappearance," and again the brigand shouted with laughter.

Monday stared at him, his laughter and his words being equally incomprehensible to him.

"Look here, now," pursued Cartouche, "no humbug. I recognized you in a moment, Brichet, my boy. Queer idea of yours, all the same, to exchange a life of ease for the certainty of ending sooner or later on the gibbet. You wanted to revenge yourself on some one, eh, *procureur?*"

"But my name is not Brichet, and I'm no more a *procureur* than you are," protested Monday.

"Bah! Tell that to the marines, old boy," said the incredulous Cartouche. "Why, I fell in with you the very day you disappeared from your house on the Quai de Bethune. Without any further proof whatever, your face is quite enough. No, no—it 's no use trying to deny your own identity, for there you are! If it pleases you to say you are not Brichet, all right, I 'm your man, and I can keep the secret. No doubt you wish to revenge yourself on some one, and you have only to give me the hint, and I 'm ready to help you." And again the robber laughed, and despite all the assertions of Monday to the contrary, he continued to the last in his belief that the escaped convict was in very truth the Procureur Brichet.

During two years Monday proved himself one of the most active members of the troupe; after each expedition retiring to his quarters in the Rue de la Bucherie, and never opening the door except to his chief or his lieutenant on his giving the password, "Let us speak of M. de Vivonne," accompanied by five single knocks on the door. For the name of the duke, now dead so many years, still lived in the memory of the convict, who had such powerful reasons for cursing it often and bitterly.

On the day of Cartouche's execution, Monday, learning the revelations made to the judge, thought it prudent to prepare for flight, and while hastily packing his valise, he was interrupted by the well-known five knocks.

Without losing a moment or pausing to don his wig and spectacles, he ran to the door and opened it without hesitation, when, to his amazement, he found himself face to face with an utter stranger.

It was Colard, who, the reader will remember, had been dispatched thither by M. de Badieres.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Such was the history of the galley-slave, Monday, until the day when Cartouche, himself deceived by the really incredible likeness of the two men, had denounced his accomplice to M. de Badieres as the Procureur Brichet, believing him firmly to be the very man, despite all protestations to the contrary.

What was the secret of this extraordinary resemblance?

If our readers will pardon another digression, the mystery will now be speedily unraveled.

During the first years of the reign of Louis Quatorze, the young monarch, then twenty-four years of age, was surrounded by a crowd of courtiers, whose sole aim in life was pleasure.

Foremost in their ranks was the already celebrated Duke de Vivonne, "first favorite" of the king and leader in every extravagant folly of his voluptuous court.

One day this gentleman and a certain Comte de Boisderey were walking together in the streets of Paris, when they found themselves in the midst of a crowd around the entrance of the Church of St. Gervais.

In the midst of the group was a young and pretty

blonde in her bridal attire, but, instead of the joy that ought to have beamed from her charming face, it was evident that the young lady was ready to burst into tears. By her side was a tall, thin young man, who evidently was the bridegroom, who was apparently using his best endeavors to smooth the ruffled plumage of the angry dove who hung upon his arm, but to all his efforts the unreasonable little person would reply with a stamp of her tiny foot:

"I told you so! I always said it was no use to count on him."

At this moment the duke and his friend came close on the little crowd, and De Vivonne, whose eye was ever open for the sight of a pretty face, cried hastily to his friend:

"See, Boisderey, by Venus, what a lovely little creature!"

"Yes, but it is all she can do to keep from crying," replied the other.

"Can they be marrying her against her will to that long-legged ass? If so, I shall not allow it!" exclaimed De Vivonne, and marching into the midst of the group, who respectfully made way for the young nobleman, he walked straight toward the bride.

"What is your name, my sweet child?" he asked.

"It is still Leonie Thureau, though I am only waiting the pleasure of Monsieur Luchat to turn it into Madame Brichet?" she replied.

"And who is Monsieur Luchat?" inquired the duke.

"He is a *procureur*, and Monsieur Brichet is his clerk. He promised to be our witness, but I suppose he is too fine a gentleman to keep his word."

"But why don't you replace him?"

"Ah, that 's just what I was saying to Brichet, but

the stupid is afraid to displease his master by taking another witness."

"And you, poor child, wish to become Madame Brichet as quickly as possible, don't you?" cried the laughing duke.

"Well, sir, now that I have taken the trouble to come to church, I scarcely wish to go home again in the same condition," said the fair bride with a charming pout.

"Come, then," he replied promptly, "I will be your witness myself, and I tell you fairly that not only am I a much better man than your M. Luchat, but that he will feel highly honored when he knows who has replaced him," and so saying the duke presented his arm to the young lady, who, without the slightest hesitation, laid her little hand on his sleeve and immediately entered the church, followed by the wedding procession.

If may readily be imagined with what wondering eyes these humble people beheld the signing of the register—the witness setting forth his noble name, titles and quality. Heaven had indeed befriended the young couple in sending them such a patron!

On leaving the little party at the church door, the duke imprinted a hearty kiss on each blushing cheek of the bride, crying, gayly:

"Good-by for the present, sweet child, and as fate has decreed that I should officiate at this ceremony, I hope, before the year is out, you will call upon me to attend another, for I reserve to myself the honor of being godfather! So, *au revoir*, Madame Brichet!" and passing his arm through that of Boisderey, the merry duke went his careless way.

The two friends walked together to the door of the Hotel de Montemart, where De Vivonne then lived

with his father and three beautiful sisters, each destined to play a prominent part in the scandals of the time.

One of them, in full toilet, was waiting in the grand *salon* when her brother entered, still laughing merrily.

"You seem very gay, Victor," she remarked.

"Ah, my dear Athenais, just let me tell you what I have been about!"

Two years younger than the duke, Athenais de Montemart, better known to posterity as the Marquise de Montespan, was then at the commencement of her reign of beauty, and one of the most exquisitely lovely women who ever ruled in the court of France.

But at the moment of which we write her star was only rising in the firmament of royal favor, and she, overwhelmed with a burning desire for power and fame, was ready to catch the ball that fate had so auspiciously rolled to her feet. "Favorite of the king!" Yes, the position was a splendid one, as Athenais knew full well. How far the ambitious girl on the present occasion succeeded in her designs, we cannot now say; but at the end of seven months, when the court quitted Fontainebleau, certain it is that instead of returning to her father's house in Paris, the wayward Athenais chose to shut herself up in a little *château*, part of the family property, a few miles from Chartres.

"Does she think of becoming a nun?" the duke asked himself; but after the lapse of six weeks he received a letter from her, begging him to pay her a visit—a visit to be kept a profound secret between the two. Four days later and De Vivonne was in his sister's presence, whom he found pale and languid.

"Are you ill, my sister?" he inquired.

"Yes, with rage," she replied curtly. "I love the king. I gave him the right to believe it, and the next day I was utterly forgotten!" cried she, her eyes ablaze with fury.

There was a moment's silence, and then she continued:

"I have conceived a plan. I believe the king would feel a peculiar tenderness for the woman who should first awaken in his heart a joy he has never known—I mean the joy of paternity."

Athenais looked steadily at the duke and said curtly:

"Louis must become a father within fifteen days."

The duke turned toward her with a look of the most unfeigned astonishment, and remarked:

"Ah, indeed, but I always thought that before cooking your hare you had to catch it."

"Quite true, my brother; and you will be the hunter who will catch me my hare," retorted the unabashed girl.

"Bah!" exclaimed the duke, who now understood the service his sister required of him; and, plunged in thought, he strode up and down the room, saying to himself: "How the mischief am I to arrange this little affair?" and at last, tired of reflection, he exclaimed: "I shall get on better out-of-doors, riding in the open air. By the way, I may as well go and see Boisderey, who, at this time of the year, is sure to be at his *château*."

"You won't find him—he is dead. He was buried this morning."

"Good God! What did he die of?"

"Of blows administered to him by the jealous husband of some Parisian, to whom it seems he has paid too much attention. The husband is in prison and will, of course, be executed. As for Boisderey, they

brought him down to his place in a dying state, and though the change of air seemed at first to do him good, his injuries were mortal, and he died without even the satisfaction of seeing his murderer hanged. The wretch's name is Brichet."

At this name De Vivonne started, a sudden thought occurring to his memory.

"Brichet!" he said to himself with a smile. "By this time there may be a hare to catch in that direction," and putting spurs to his horse the duke set out instantly for Paris.

"Now to find out Madame Brichet," he thought, on approaching the capital.

The duke had an excellent memory for names, and easily recalled that of the Procureur "Luchat," the dilatory witness whom he had so opportunely replaced at the wedding. The *procureur* was not difficult to discover, and De Vivonne was received with all the deference due to his rank. A short interview elicited the following facts: It seemed that the young couple had lived in perfect happiness, excepting for Brichet's insane jealousy. Among her admirers was the Comte de Boisderey, who persisted in hovering around her, to her extreme annoyance. Mme. Brichet in an evil moment complained to her husband, who had lain in wait for the comte and beaten him so unmercifully that an hour later he had been picked up by the guard, dying. Brichet had made no attempt to escape, and the judges of the Châtelet at once condemned him to death; but great sympathy being felt for the unhappy man, a petition had been set on foot by M. Luchat and signed by all the principal inhabitants of the neighborhood, praying for a commutation of the sentence. This had been granted, and Brichet, instead of being executed, was resentenced to the galleys for twenty years,

and he was now lying in prison, awaiting his departure for Toulon. Meanwhile his poor little wife, who was in daily expectation of becoming a mother, spent her days in sighing and her nights in tears.

This was all the duke wanted to know ; so, bidding the *procureur* a courteous farewell, he rode down to the *quai*, and leaving his horse in charge of a soldier, made his way on foot and enveloped in his cloak toward the poor woman's house. He ascended the stair and knocked. A moment more and he was face to face with Mme. Brichet, who, stupefied with grief, stood speechless before him, vainly trying to remember where and when she had seen his handsome face. All at once the recollection flashed on her.

"Ah, yes, the great nobleman of our marriage day ! Oh, it is Heaven who sends you to me, your grace ! You are powerful, and you will make them give me back my husband !" cried the unhappy woman, falling on her knees. Kissing the duke's hands again and again, she remained kneeling before him, crying on him to save her husband.

De Vivonne raised the young woman gently and led her to a chair, saying in his sweetest voice :

"Compose yourself, my child, and then we shall talk a little."

In these kind words the unhappy woman, seeing a glimmer of hope, controlled herself by a spasmodic effort, and clasping her hands together, cried in feverish haste :

"I am calm now. Speak, your grace, speak ! Say that you will give me back my husband."

But the duke shook his head, sadly.

"Brichet has committed a crime," he answered gravely. "Your husband has killed a man, for his victim died four days ago. If Monsieur de Boisderey

had recovered, the king might, perhaps, have been induced to pardon him, but as it is you must renounce all hope."

"What, and shall I never see my husband again! Oh, my God!" cried the unhappy girl, wringing her hands, and a terrible despair in her voice.

"Yes, you will see him again—in twenty years," added the duke in an awful whisper.

"What!" she almost shrieked. "Brichet will not be here to receive his child's first embrace, and cannot you, the king's favorite friend, give me back the father of the poor little creature who is about to come into the world?"

But the duke did not answer. At his silence, which shattered all Mme. Brichet's new-formed hopes, the poor woman lost herself in a perfect tempest of despair.

"Oh," she cried in her madness, "oh, that it might die before it sees the light!"

"Why should you wish your child to die?" asked the duke, quietly.

"And what am I to answer when some day it asks for its father—its father whom it will never know, for Brichet cannot survive that life of infamy. Yes, better that my child should never be born."

"Especially if by its death you could save your husband?" said the duke very slowly, taking the opportunity he had been seeking to introduce his proposal. At his strange words Mme. Brichet looked at him with haggard, searching eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I was only making a supposition," replied De Vivonne, calmly. "If by chance your child should be born dead, and Providence should console you for the affliction by restoring to you your husband, would

you be glad to accept the dispensation of Providence ?"

The young woman hesitated a moment and then replied :

"Brichet's life saved, his love for me would make up to me for the sacrifice."

"And supposing some one instead of Providence were to come and say to you : 'Less exacting than Providence, I do not require the death of your child ; for if he lives, a life of ease and happiness is assured to him. Give me your child, and I will give you back your husband,' what would you answer ?"

Mme. Brichet rose from her seat and stood before the duke, trembling, frightened, and asking herself whether she could possibly have heard aright.

"Do you wish me to buy my husband at the price of my child ?" she gasped out.

"Say yes," replied Vivonne ; "say yes, and the moment the child is given up your husband will be with you, and you will simply tell him that the child is dead. Say yes, and, beside your husband's pardon, you shall have a good round sum of money, enough for Brichet to buy the practice of the *procureur*. Say yes, for you and I alone will know this secret, which to your husband must never be told, for he must believe that the child died. This is my offer ; do you accept it ?"

But at the duke's words, the mother's love overcame utterly her conjugal affection, and in a voice of horror Mme. Brichet cried :

"Never !"

"Very well, then," pursued the duke, calmly ; "let us see what will be the consequence of your refusal. Poverty and misery will ruin your health and you will be unable to nourish your child, who will probably

die at your breast, or you will have to send it to the foundling hospital."

"Never!" again cried the poor young woman, driven to despair.

"And during this time," continued De Vivonne, in his former tone, "Brichet's life will be an absolute hell. Chained to his seat, night and day, surrounded by a band of most desperate ruffians, half murdered with blows and in every way most cruelly treated—for the life of a galley-slave is indeed a fearful one!—Brichet, without hope, without support, without consolation, a prey to suppressed rage and despair, will very soon sink under his terrible sufferings, *from which you have the power to deliver him*," and the duke slowly emphasized his last words.

It was too much for Mme. Brichet. The horrible picture drawn by the duke almost convulsed her with terror, and falling on her knees before him, she cried!

"Enough, enough, your grace! For God's sake say no more! I accept!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The duke had but little difficulty in obtaining a free pardon for Brichet from the king, who was ever ready to comply with any request from the friend of his childhood, and while signing the "letter of grace," asked the duke, with some hesitation :

"What has become of your sister, who seems to have disappeared since our return from Fontainebleau?"

"Athenais has gone away by herself to the country, where she remains buried with a persistence that leads me to imagine she is trying to forget some hidden grief," replied De Vivonne, playing into his sister's hands, and then he added, with feigned *naivété:* "For a moment I thought she must have had the misfortune to displease your majesty."

The king tried to repress a knowing smile as he remarked :

"When you write to your sister you can tell her that we have been thinking of her and that eer long she will have the proof of our solicitude for her future."

The duke bowed low, delighted at the royal condescension, and, withdrawing, wondered within himself whether Athenais had really succeeded in securing the monarch's love.

One week later, and De Vivonne received the expected summons from Mme. Brichet. Taking with him the free pardon and a bag well filled with gold, the duke presented himself at Mme. Brichet's door, and after a moment's interview with his own physician, whom he had sent to the young woman's assistance, he speedily made his way back to the carriage, which he had left on the *quai*. He had not long to wait, for in a few minutes the doctor appeared, carrying the new-born infant, which being given into the charge of a confidential maid (who had accompanied the duke thither), De Vivonne descended from the carriage, and it immediately drove off at a rapid pace toward Chartres.

"Your grace will excuse me if I return to my patient," said the doctor, bowing and hastily disappearing in the darkness.

De Vivonne stood still for a moment; then turning, he slowly made his way back to the Hotel de Montemart. On further reflection he deemed it advisable to absent himself from Paris, so he set out for the *château* of M. de Vardes, who at that moment was entertaining a large shooting party. During the first ten days the conversation of these gentlemen was entirely concerning sport, but on the eleventh day the arrival of a new guest revived their interest in the outside world.

"What news from the court?" they cried in chorus.

"What, have you not heard the great, the astounding, the incredible news of the day?" asked the newcomer.

"No, no, tell us, quickly!"

"Well, gentlemen, our royal butterfly, the king, has been caught at last, and for the last five days he is the declared lover of—a certain lady."

"Impossible!" was the unanimous reply, uttered in every variation of tone.

"It appears that the affair was at first deliciously mysterious—quite a hidden love—but it was impossible to keep the secret any longer, and the delights of paternity emboldened the king to appear openly in his lady-love's colors."

"Aha!" thought De Vivonne with high glee. "It appears that my beloved sister has succeeded in her little game."

"And what is the name of this new star which has risen in the royal firmament?" asked another.

"She has received a new name, for only yesterday her royal lover created her duchess in her own right."

"Athenais must be crazy with joy," thought the duke, never doubting that his sister was the lady in question.

"But her name, her name!" they all cried again.

"Well, gentlemen, since you must know, it is Mlle. Louise de la Blaume, whom the king has now created Duchess de la Vallière."

"What!" cried De Vivonne, starting suddenly to his feet and growing pale.

"Just look at De Vivonne's face! He is actually pale at the thought of the king having chosen a lame lady!" and all eyes were turned to the duke, whose emotion was thus attributed to surprise.

"Lame indeed she is!" said another.

"Yes, but lame or not, she is just about to become a mother, and this fact has induced the king to raise the curtain that has hitherto so discreetly veiled the royal folly," continued their informant.

That same evening the duke, furious at his sister thus having been checkmated, hastily left the *château*, and was soon riding rapidly toward Paris. On arriv-

ing at the Hotel Montemart the first person he saw was Athenais, who had returned from Chartres on the previou day. She was apparently calm, and drawing her brother aside, remarked :

"Victor, I know all. I have learned from a letter, received from Mlle. de Montalais, the triumph of Mlle. de la Vallière, and I have lost the game."

"To say nothing of your rival having been able to pay in good money the stakes that you would have paid in forged coin," said the brother with cool cynicism.

"Well, I let my little project fall to the ground," replied Athenais, curtly.

But a thought occurred to the duke.

"What did the king mean by saying he had thought of your future ?"

Mlle. de Montemart pointed to an open letter, bearing the royal seal, lying on the table.

"The explanation is in that document, which I found awaiting me here. In it I am appointed lady-in-waiting to 'madame,' and the king further informs me that he desires me to marry M. de Montespan, and that he himself will sign the contract. In fact, it is a royal command."

This marriage will insure your residence at the court—near the sun, which will shed its beneficent rays over you, my dear," said the brother, with quiet emphasis.

"And this time I shall play my cards more cleverly," murmured the young lady. And from the light that flashed in her eyes one would have imagined that already she foresaw the future, herself created Duchess of Montespan, and in her turn eclipsing her rival, La Vallière and holding her ascendency over her royal lover for fifteen prosperous years.

After a short silence the duke, suddenly striking his forehead, hastily exclaimed:

"And by Jove, what became of the infant?"

"Oh, the creature was, of course, useless to me, so I gave it to my maid Josephine with a good sum of money, and told her to leave it at the door of some decent peasant, who would be sure to take the child in," said Athenais coolly.

When the duke was alone, and at leisure to think over the affair, he laughed and said to himself:

"It would have been better to have given the child back to that pretty Mme. Brichet." But another thought struck him. "No," he said, "that would have been out of the question, because Brichet, who must now be out of prison, will have learned from his wife that the child died at birth. Better let the matter rest."

De Vivonne had scarcely come to this conclusion, than the door was thrown violently open and a man in the wildest state of excitement precipitated himself into the room, despite the efforts of several lackeys, who tried in vain to hold him back.

"Yes, I must and shall see him!" he cried, "and I know he has this morning returned from the country. He is my benefactor—my savior. I cannot lose a single moment in throwing myself at his gracious feet," and the poor fellow threw himself down before the duke, sobbing and crying with happiness.

"What, is it you, Brichet?" said the duke, instantly recognizing him.

"Yes, your grace, it is I. I, henceforth your slave, to do with what you will. You may ask me for my life, it is yours. Body and soul I belong to you, for my wife has told me all."

"Oho, so your wife has told you all?" replied the

duke, twirling his mustache, while he wondered how his wife's confession should have thus caused Brichet to overflow with happiness.

"Yes, your grace, she told me all. How you came to her yourself to claim the promise she made you, that your grace should be godfather, and I know how I owe to you my liberty, and the handsome present your grace has given the baby will enable me to purchase M. Luchat's practice. Ah, your grace, it was indeed heaven who sent you to us on our wedding-day!"

And the good fellow again wept tears of joy and fell to kissing the duke's hands with renewed vigor, the latter seeking vainly to explain to himself the joy of this father who had just heard of the death of his first-born.

"How long have you been out of prison?" asked the wondering duke.

"Ten days, your grace."

This response puzzled the duke more than ever, as it had been agreed between Mme. Brichet and himself that Brichet should not be informed of the child's death until a week after the supposed event.

"And," pursued the excited clerk, "my first duty and my pleasure was to fly here to your grace to pour out all my gratitude and further to beg you to fix the day!"

"The day! Good heavens, what day?" cried the mystified De Vivonne.

"The day for the christening, of course, your grace!"

"The christening!" gasped the duke, now utterly dumfounded.

"Yes, your grace, the christening of my son, your own godson, a splendid boy that one of my neighbors is holding in her arms downstairs. I will go and fetch him if you will allow me."

"My word, yes! I am quite curious to see him!" exclaimed the duke, giving up the conundrum in despair.

Brichet rushed to the door, dashed down the stair, and in another moment returned, carrying in his arms his little son, whom he presented to his benefactor, who, gazing dreamily at the infant, thought within himself:

"What trick can the little woman have played her husband?" he said, lost in thought. Then suddenly awakening to the reality, he said, with a smile: "Then you are perfectly happy, eh, Brichet?"

"Ah, your grace, can you doubt it? And I owe it all—all to you!"

"Well, Brichet, henceforth you may count among your clients the house of Montemart."

"Thanks, thanks, your grace! Your goodness is overwhelming, and now I have nothing left to wish for but that you will name the day."

"True, Brichet. Well, let us say this day fortnight," said the duke, smiling and touched at the poor fellow's delight, "and I hope by that time your wife will be strong enough to be present at the ceremony," he added, thinking he would thus have an opportunity of getting at the truth from Mme. Brichet.

"In a fortnight. Very good, your grace," and the clerk went away, radiant with happiness.

But it was not decreed that the duke should remain in his bewilderment much longer, for the following day he received a visit from his physician, whom he had not seen since they parted on the *quai*. The worthy doctor had come to receive his promised fee, which had been fixed in advance. The duke placed a pile of louis on the table. The doctor counted the money with one glance, but stood there silent.

"Well, doctor, isn't that all right?" asked De Vivonne.

"Well, no, your grace, for I am sure you are too just not to admit that when there is double work there should be double pay."

"Double pay! What the devil do you mean?" cried the duke.

"Then your grace does not know what happened?" asked the doctor, in amazement.

"Why, what has happened?" demanded the duke, thinking there was to be no end to the day's mystifications.

"Well, your grace, when I left you on the *quai*, I returned immediately to my interesting patient, and found, to my surprise, that during my absence she had given birth to another son, twin brother to him who at that moment was being carried away in the post chaise."

"By Venus!" exclaimed the duke, a flood of light thus falling on the whole mystery.

"And I think that your grace will now allow that I have fairly earned a double fee," continued the physician.

"Quite so," replied the duke, rising and laying a second pile of louis on the table, and this time the doctor was not slow in taking possession of his reward. Bowing low, he walked toward the door, saying, as he left the room:

"I hope your grace may soon require me again," as if he imagined the duke was possessed with a mania for making himself a large collector of children.

Left to himself, De Vivonne burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

"Yes," he said, "I see it all now! What a stroke of luck for little Mme. Brichet! The husband will go

to his grave without the slightest suspicion that he was the father of twins!"

At last the day of the christening came. Pale, but again restored to beauty by the healing influences of happiness, Mme. Brichet trembled visibly when the duke appeared at her side, throwing him one supplicating glance, which he well understood as a mute appeal to his honor. Finding himself alone with her for a moment, amidst the immense crowd assembled to witness the singular good fortune of the young couple, he hastily whispered:

"You have nothing to fear, madame, for I swear to you, on the honor of a gentleman, that your secret shall go with me to the tomb."

A flash of gratitude escaped from Mme. Brichet's soft eyes, but in another moment her sweet face was overclouded with sadness, for from her heart there had risen a question to her lips that she scarcely dared pronounce, but summoning all her courage and blushing vividly, she at length stammered:

"What has become of—the other?"

The duke, anxious to put an end to any recollection of the sad past at once and forever, answered promptly:

"He died."

One look told the anguish of the poor mother's heart, as she murmured:

"Ah, Heaven has already punished me!"

De Vivonne felt truly sorry for her, and, stooping down, said, in his sweetest voice:

"Take courage, dear child. Don't you see, on the contrary, that Heaven is smiling on you? At the price of this infant, who would have died in any case, you have received all the happiness you so justly merited."

And this was the last time the duke ever beheld Mme. Brichet. Years passed away, each adding new honors to the name of De Vivonne, who, owing to the powerful influence of his sister and the faithful friendship of the king, became a pillar of the state, and amidst the increasing occupations of a public life all recollections of his humble *protégés* was swept away. It was not until eighteen years later that his dormant memory was awakened by the extraordinary likeness of the young galley-slave to Brichet, and he recognized in him the infant twin whom his sister Athenais had abandoned to chance on the public road. Our readers will now understand the exclamation of M. de Vivonne, when travelling toward Versailles :

"Strange freak of destiny! This young villain will now probably die at the galleys, when for a moment he seemed destined to play the part of a prince."

But for the present we must leave the escaped galley-slave, who, after thirty-seven years at the galleys, had joined Cartouche's band, and follow the fortunes of M. and Mme. Brichet, who now were leaving the church after their infant's baptism. The munificence of their kind patron soon put Brichet in possession of M. Luchat's office ; and the extensive business of the house of Montemart, which now fell into his hands, besides the liberal patronage of the Duchess of Montespan, caused the Procureur Brichet to become one of the richest and most celebrated lawyers of the day. The worthy Brichet never doubted for a single moment that the son who was the joy and pride of his life was the only child with which Providence had blessed him, and the boy grew up in the belief that M. de Vivonne was in very truth the guardian-angel of his family.

Twenty-eight years after his promise to Mme. Brichet the duke was gathered to his fathers, and three years later the grave closed, too, on her happy existence. With these two persons, the secret of the twin child's birth was buried forever.

A widower and millionaire, we have seen how the Procureur Brichet built himself a magnificent mansion on the Quai de Bethune, and having ceded his business to his son Louis Victor, was about to take possession of his new abode when death laid his cold hand upon him. The only survivor, then, of the little family was Brichet, our hero, he whom we have designated "the late Brichet."

We must now go back to the hotel on the Quai de Bethune, where the funeral bells are still ringing out their ghastly chime, announcing to all the neighborhood that Brichet, the *procureur*, is dead and buried—Brichet, the last of his name, who it was believed had succumbed to a second attack of apoplexy. What had been the motive of Colard's conduct? Why should this model of serving men, who seemed the very incarnation of devotion, have poisoned his master? And why, stranger still, should the old attendant, left alone in the hotel, have exhibited every sign of unmistakable happiness on hearing the funeral bells announce beyond a doubt that all was ended?

For all answer to these questions we shall resume our story at the point where, behind the guilty Colard, a voice was heard uttering the one terrible word, "Murderer!" and when, on beholding him who had spoken, the old attendant fell prostrate to the ground. For a deadly terror had seized on the wretched man. The sound of the priests' voices chanting the requiem over the body of Brichet came floating on the air, the funeral bells were yet clanging for Brichet, the multitude were

pressing around to cast holy water on the bier that held the remains of the *procureur*, when, lo, as an apparition from the land of spirits, arose before him his victim, Brichet! Yes, it was Brichet himself who, now standing before the guilty attendant, cried aloud:

"Murderer!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

Yes, Brichet it was. Not, indeed, the *procureur* of recent days, he of the harassed countenance, suspicious eye and uneasy mien who that very morning had been placed in his coffin, but the Brichet of old, calm, grave and dignified, at peace with God and man.

When Colard regained consciousness, he saw Doctor Gardi bending over him, who had entered the room during his fainting-fit. Brichet, seated close by, awaited anxiously the complete restoration of the attendant.

"Maurice," he said, on seeing Colard open his eyes, "may we not be interrupted here by some one entering during the interview I must have with this man?"

"No, Monsieur Brichet, no one will come. Nearly all the servants have gone to pay visits to their friends, Madame Brichet has retired to her pavilion, and I myself conducted Mademoiselle Pauline to her own rooms; and even if I had not taken the precaution to lock the door, the apartments of the dead would be perfectly sacred. You may be certain, sir, that no one will intrude on us."

Reassured, Brichet turned toward his servant and said to him severely:

"Come here, wretch!"

Colard endeavored to come forward, but after stepping a few steps, fell upon his knees with clasped hands, crying, in a broken voice:

"Forgive me, my master, forgive me!"

"Yes, your place is, indeed, at my feet," answered Brichet, "you who have repaid all my kindness with the most atrocious crimes!" And after a moment's pause he continued: "Now answer me."

Colard remained on his knees, his head bent down, Maurice standing in the background, a silent spectator of this painful scene.

"Before referring to your horrid crime, let us recall for a moment the circumstances that preceded it. I had just married Aurore, and I loved my young wife passionately. I was happy, and trusted her entirely. One day you brought me a note addressed to her by a certain Baron de Cambiac, requesting a rendezvous. Do you remember that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you find the note?"

"I found it in your wife's room. She had intended to throw it in the fire, but it fell in a corner of the hearth, and I found it there when I was removing the ashes during madame's absence."

Brichet continued:

"While it alluded to some affection of the past between the young people, the note was in no way compromising to Aurore. With one word you could have dispelled all my uneasiness, but instead you did your very utmost to excite my jealousy. According to you there was a love affair between Aurore and Monsieur de Cambiac; you declared they were in the habit of meeting. I had unlimited confidence in you and believed it. Fool that I was!"

"I lied, sir. Madame Aurore was always irreproachable," said the penitent Colard.

"I became furious against my wife, and would have openly accused her, but you prevented me by saying it would be useless, that she would deny all so long as I had no actual proof. Do you remember that, liar?" Without awaiting a reply, Brichet continued: "It was then I had the folly to listen to you and to adopt your odious advice, to my unspeakable misfortune. I had to feign that I was going on a long journey and then return secretly on the following night. At midnight you were to open the little garden gate and admit me and lead me to the presence of the lovers, who were to meet beneath my roof in my supposed absence." Here the old man paused a moment, deeply moved by painful memories. "My confidence in you was such that I concealed nothing from you, and I had told you of having made a will, leaving my entire fortune to my young wife. I admit I was wrong, and that I acted unworthily toward my beloved daughter."

Colard here shook his head and murmured:

"Ah, yes, that has been the cause of all our misfortunes."

But without heeding him Brichet went on:

"It was natural that I should not allow a woman who had so deceived me to become rich by my death; besides, desiring to atone to my daughter for the wrong I had done her, I therefore went, on the day before my departure, to Badineau's office to alter my will. It appears that this alteration interested you deeply, for you questioned me a dozen times as to whether or not it had been done. At last the hour drew near when you were to conduct me to the guilty lovers whom you declared were about to meet. It was agreed that I should go away at night, leaving a letter

announcing my journey to my wife and daughter. I went away, taking no luggage except my fire-arms, to punish those who had dishonored me, and a large sum of money, with which to fly to a foreign country, when I had killed the culprits."

It appeared that all these details were perfectly familiar to Maurice, who listened to Brichet's recital without the slightest surprise.

The *procureur* went on :

"The following night at twelve o'clock I knocked, and you opened the little garden-gate. 'They are together,' you said. 'Take me to them,' I answered, walking into the garden, but you put out your hand and detained me, asking me whether I had remade my will in Pauline's favor. 'Yes, a hundred times yes, I tell you !' I answered impatiently, pushing away your hand and advancing resolutely, but I had not proceeded three steps when, suddenly rushing upon me from behind, you buried a poniard to the hilt between my shoulders. Assassin, do you dare to deny your crime ?"

"I confess that I wished to kill you," replied the attendant, curtly.

He had risen, and stood before his master, pale and somber, his arms folded on his breast. At the frank admission of his crime, Brichet and Maurice exchanged a look of astonishment, for both had expected that Colard would attempt to exculpate himself rather than avow his guilt, as he did with a kind of fierce energy.

"Then you confess to having laid a trap for me in exciting my jealousy ?" asked the *procureur*.

"Certainly, a trap ; for your wife was innocent, and I knew it. My sole desire was to kill you," answered Colard, calmly, his voice no longer trembling.

Brichet gazed at the man before him, wondering at

the cool cynicism with which this man—whom he had ever known to be upright, devoted, affectionate—boasted of his deadly crime.

"Listen," continued Brichet. "When I recovered my senses I was lying in a poor garret, for behind the murderer God had sent me a savior," and turning toward Maurice, the *procureur* gratefully pressed his hand.

Colard saw the gesture, and his eyes glistened with joy.

"Ah," he said, "it was M. Maurice who saved you; that was right!"

Brichet and the doctor again exchanged glances of surprise.

"Yes, it was he who found me lying in the square, at the point of death, and who, unassisted, carried me to his own poor home. On recovering my senses I was consumed with a desire for vengeance, feeling certain that it was De Cambiac and Aurore who had bribed you to murder me. Maurice gave me his word that he would keep my secret, and by means of the large sum of money with which I was provided, I bought the whole house, of which he inhabited the garret, dismissed the other tenants, and there I passed the period of my convalescence.

"At last, my health restored, I left the doctor's house and took a lodging in this neighborhood, where, during two long years, I have watched you, Colard. I have seen you going and coming, and no action of yours is unknown to me. Of my wife's fidelity I had no longer the faintest suspicion, but I was absorbed by an overwhelming desire to discover your reasons for attempting to murder me."

A sickly smile appeared for a moment on the white lips of the old servant as he asked slowly:

"And did you find out?"

"No," replied Brichet, "I did not. Vainly I prowled about in the neighborhood, listening here, watching there—nothing escaping my notice, and no one ever penetrating my disguise. Where others were in doubt as to the culprit, there I saw your hand, for it was you who struck down De Lozeril in the square, was it not?"

"Yes. In order to preserve my secret."

"And it was you who brought hither the ruffian who took my place?"

"It was I."

"And you killed him with the poison you stole from me," added Maurice.

"That is true," said Colard, calmly.

"Wretched man!" cried the *procureur*. "Your crimes have merited the last penalty of the law, and yet, in the midst of all your infamy, I have seen you ever devoted to my Pauline and strictly honest in the administration of my property, for not one crown of all the large sums that have passed through your hands has been misappropriated. What, then, can have been your motive?"

Colard appeared to hesitate, and then said in a choking voice:

"Do you really want to know, sir?"

"Yes, Colard."

The attendant shook his head.

"Then," he said resolutely, "call me no no longer Colard, Monsieur Brichet, for it is not my name."

"Who, then, in God's name, are you?" gasped the astonished *procureur*, leaning forward with terrible earnestness in his eyes.

The old servant strode forward the few paces that separated him from his master, and looking him steadily in the face, answered slowly:

"I am the cobbler Pigeot, your dead wife's father."

At this name, unheard for so many years, the *procureur* sank back in his chair, utterly overcome, murmuring:

"You! Can it be possible! Pigeot of Nancy, my first father-in-law!"

"Yes, it is I, the cobbler, whose low condition would have put you to shame, and who, to secure the happiness of his only child, consented never to see her more. Fool that you were," continued the old man with a contemptuous shrug, "to imagine that a parent would hold to such a bargain. What father would renounce the joy of seeing his child, of feeling there on his breast the being he most adores, of covering with kisses that beloved head, of being the slave to all her wishes, of rejoicing in her happiness, of grieving at her pain, and in his turn to feel himself beloved—in short, to be a father! Ah, believe me, Monsieur Brichet, it is not in human nature to relinquish a joy so pure, so sweet, so real. Needless to tell you, I never lived at Nancy. Paris was my home, and there I lived, struggling at my poor trade to bring up my daughter, whose mother died at her birth. In the midst of my poverty I had always one mania, to see my daughter one day happy and rich. Alas, it was but an empty dream, for work was scarce; so abandoning it altogether, I confided my daughter to a respectable neighbor, and hearing that you were in want of a valet, I secured the vacant place. I took the name of 'Colard,' for I entered your service with a vague and foolish hope. Foolish? Yes, it seemed so, but it was to be realized. At the end of a year I had learned the true worth and amiability of your character, and in you I saw all that I could desire in the husband of my beloved daughter. Then I laid my plans. Again and again I arranged,

unknown to her, that she should cross your path, and at length one day you noticed and were struck by her singular beauty. Your first idea was to make her your mistress; but knowing that to a nature like yours resistance would only increase the desire for possession, I rejected all your overtures in her name, until at last you resolved to make her your wife. Only one consideration restrained you—the fact of the low-born father. It was then that I volunteered to visit Nancy, see the cobbler and obtain his renunciation. After some days I pretended to return with the desired agreement, but in reality I had never left your house. The only difficulty was in obtaining my daughter's consent to the conditions involved in the marriage, to see her father one of the servants in her own house, and to keep a secret from her husband, for she was an honest, loyal girl!"

"As she was a true and noble wife!" sighed Brichet, his eyes filling with tears.

"At last I overcame her scruples, and the marriage took place. The dream of my life was realized! Ah, what happy years I have passed in this house! My daughter prosperous, honored, beloved by all, rich and poor! How often a stolen kiss or a warm clasp of her hand has made my poor heart beat wildly with joy! Yes, yes, my happiness was indeed complete; more so, indeed, than hers, sweet child, for the thought that she was committing even the shadow of a deception grieved her gentle heart. Seventeen years passed away like a flash, and before I could realize my happiness it was gone. Suddenly stricken down, my daughter was taken from me—from *me*, who would gladly have died for her! Ah, heaven is too cruel! The grief of a parent burying his only child!" And the old man burst into a tempest of sobs. "I should

have died of grief if God, in his mercy, had not sent me another being to love and watch over, in the place of her who was now one of His angels. Yes, all my tenderness and devotion were now centered in my beloved little Pauline, whom henceforth I adored with a sort of grief-stricken frenzy. My daughter had died so suddenly that she had not had time to reveal to Pauline the identity of the old attendant, and for her I am and ever shall be only 'Colard;' but I accepted the sacrifice, and the one object of my life became her welfare and interest. I became utterly implacable toward any one who should do her the shadow of a wrong, and in my mind, Monsieur Brichet, your fortune belonged to Pauline, whole and undivided, and I imagined you could not deprive her of a sou. Fool that I was! Soon you convinced me of my error. One day you announced to me your intended marriage. Ah, sir, you little knew the rage that surged within me, tempting me to strike you dead at my feet! Then I resolved sooner or later to murder you, and only waited, watching my opportunity. I did not find it before your marriage, but I dogged your footsteps continually in the hope that it might come. Ten days later I overheard a conversation between you and Monsieur Badineau, by which it was clear to me that you had made a will in favor of your young wife, thus despoiling my Pauline of her inheritance. All my endeavors were now bent on persuading you to alter that will, which I at last accomplished by successfully poisoning your mind with suspicions of Mme. Aurore. This done, and the wealth once more secured to Pauline, I might now murder you, and I did so, or, rather, I thought I had done so. After stabbing you in the garden, I lifted you on my shoulders, and taking off my shoes, was carrying you toward the river to throw your

body into the Seine, when in the square Monsieur de Lozeril seemed suddenly to rise out of the darkness and arrest my progress. Terrified, I dropped my burden, and the young man fell under your body. I fled homeward, and only succeeded in getting inside the little garden gate and closing it, when I fell fainting to the ground. How long I remained insensible I cannot say, but when I recovered, my first thought was to run to the Square to see what had become of my victim. He had disappeared."

"My savior had rescued me," said Brichet, once more clasping the hand of Maurice.

CHAPTER XXX.

During this interview all had been silent in the great house, but now the sound of the heavy knocker at the grand entrance announced the arrival of a visitor, and in another moment footsteps resounded on the gravel-walk beneath the open window of Brichet's bedroom. Maurice advanced cautiously and looked down.

"It is Monsieur de Badieres going toward the pavilion," he said.

At the judge's name Brichet turned quickly and looked at Colard, but the attendant shook his head with quiet contempt, and said calmly :

"I understand, Monsieur Brichet. You wish to observe whether I tremble at the magistrate's name. No, sir. Believe me that when one has been playing for heavy stakes, as I have during the last three years, one cannot but think often of what will be the end in case of final defeat. I have lost the game, and I am well prepared to pay. The thought of death has no terror for me, but before the hand of Justice seizes me, Monsieur de Badieres will be surprised to learn that he himself has been my involuntary accomplice in carrying out the bold deception I have practiced."

"What can you mean ?" cried Brichet, amazed.

"Listen and you will see. For many days and weeks following my crime I lived in constant dread of the pursuit of justice, but time passed on, nothing happened, and I began to breathe again. At the end of six months the thought of the murder I had committed, far from filling me with remorse, only awakened within me a bitter rage that it had been perpetrated in vain. Yes, I had murdered you that my Pauline might be rich and happy, but it was impossible to prove your death. No one knew it but myself; every one believed you were travelling, and looked forward to your return, so that the fortune waited there without an owner, and my grandchild was as far from it as ever. For a moment I even formed a desperate project of confessing my crime and declaring the death."

To this revelation Brichet and Maurice listened in silence, and despite the horror it inspired they could not but pity the old man whose paternal love had thus led him to commit three murders.

Pigeot continued:

"About this time Cartouche was captured, and when brought before M. De Badieres he named you, sir, as one of his confederates."

"Me!" cried the *procureur*, rising from his chair, almost paralyzed with amazement.

"Oh, sir," said the attendant, "Cartouche might, indeed, have been deceived, for the likeness was so extraordinary that on first seeing the man I was absolutely convinced it was yourself. Astonished by the brigand's assertion, which was confirmed by showing a portrait of you, M. De Badieres, listening to the voice of friendship rather than the dictates of duty, came here at once and sent me with a message to you, warning you to fly. He gave me your address and the

password without, however, telling me whom I was about to meet. On finding myself in the presence of this man, whom I firmly believed to be you, I was so overcome by emotion that for the first few moments I stood before him utterly speechless. I believed myself face to face with my victim, who would doubtless now take his revenge, but he, on his side, seemed suspicious and uneasy.

"'Well,' he cried, 'is that all you came up here for —to stand there gaping and staring like a dying fish?'

"I then found words, and warned him to fly, telling him of Cartouche's denunciation. By this time I had examined the man carefully, and gradually the truth dawned on me that I had been mistaken, but it suddenly occurred to me that I might possibly find a use for this most incredible resemblance, so I said nothing of M. De Badieres, merely representing myself as one of the gang and advising him to keep himself concealed until I could provide him with a safer retreat.

"'Let the first energy of the police expend itself. When that is over we shall find plenty of expeditions to make money by.'

"'Good,' said he, 'I shall stay here in this hole as if I were dead, and you will tell me when I may come out.'

"I returned to the hotel, little imagining what was about to happen. The Chevalier de Lozeril having called to see the captain, proceeded, on finding himself in presence of M. de Badieres, *apropos* of Cartouche, to give the details of a nocturnal adventure in the square. I was there, and hearing all, knew that it was he who had seen me carrying my ghastly burden, and who could now, after two years of security, be my ruin. The portrait was then shown to him, and though he had denied any resemblance to the body

he had seen, I was certain, by the amazed expression of his face that his denial was a lie. I read in his countenance his evil character, and trembled as I saw the bold and insolent glances he threw toward Pauline. I shuddered to think of the sweet child falling into the hands of such a scoundrel. I resolved to kill him and thus rid myself of the only witness of my crime. De Lozeril himself furnished me with a pretext which insured me against all suspicion. Believing his life to be in danger from the violence of Annibal, he had the imprudence to write a letter declaring himself, in case of his death, the victim of Fouquier and his daughter. While he was writing, I read his statement over his shoulder, and he had the further folly to leave the hotel with this letter undestroyed in his pocket. I let him out at the grand entrance, and taking a short cut through the garden came upon him in the square, where I stabbed him. He fell down in a lifeless heap, after uttering one piercing cry. Oh," cried Pigeot, with a dreary laugh, "that night I slept well, for I thought I had arrived at the end of all my troubles. I had nothing now to fear from De Lozeril, for I believed beyond a doubt I had killed him, and that, by means of the letter which would be found on his body, I should be revenged on Annibal and Aurore, those birds of prey who had come to fatten on the fortune of my little Pauline. Pauline would inherit the fortune, and my designs would be crowned with success at the expense of Fouquier and his daughter, whom I detested with all my heart. Yes, that night I slept well !"

Silent, and shuddering at the old man's ferocity, his two listeners remained spell-bound, almost imagining it must all be an evil dream, so incredible did it appear that paternal love should be the motive power of this horrible malignity. The attendant resumed :

"What frightful sufferings I endured at that cursed trial, seeing my cherished hopes extinguished one by one, and knowing that my two enemies would come out triumphant from the trap I had laid for them. Something seemed to burst within my brain, and I felt that I was going mad when I heard Monsieur Badineau declare that you must have burned the wrong will, and that all my labor had thus been in vain. Ah, you may threaten me with all the penalties of the law, but nothing in existence, not all the torments of hell, could ever approach the horrible agony I endured that awful day. I had suffered and sinned that those two cursed creatures should walk forth free from the tribunal and seize on all my Pauline's millions! Ah, my God, I thought I should die! For the third time I was baffled—all was lost. All at once there came to me the thought of that man and his extraordinary resemblance. Brichet need not remain dead. I could bring him to life. I rushed like a madman from the hall of justice and flew to the Rue de la Bucherie. On seeing me appear the bandit uttered a cry of joy.

"'Ah,' he cried, 'is it you? I thought you had forgotten me,' and then he added quickly: 'You have found some good affair that will put us in funds?'

"'Would you care to gain thirty thousand francs in a fortnight?' I said.

"He opened his eyes at this tempting proposition, and replied:

"'Certainly. What is there to do?'

"'Have you plenty of audacity?'

"'Well, timidity is hardly my besetting sin.'

"'Have you a good memory?'

"'Perfect.'

"'Can you write?'

"He burst into a shout of laughter.

"'Do I know how to write? Well, rather! And more than that, too! Look here,' he said, taking up a piece of paper. 'See, this morning I had nothing to do, so I amused myself by writing that.'

"I took up the paper and found that between the written lines, Monday had produced a copy so exact that it was impossible to decide which was the original. My heart beat wildly with hope on seeing the clever forgery.

"'Well,' said I, 'now listen carefully,' and I told him how he must immediately appear at the tribunal, and how, the time being too short to give him full instructions, I must trust to his intelligence to do his best.

"'Good, good!' he said. 'And if I find myself up a tree I will cover my face with my handkerchief and cry; that will pull me through; they will think I am overcome with emotion,' and the brigand laughed heartily.

"'Once you get over the *début* it will be easy enough,' I said, 'for every day I will give you a lesson and tell you what to do and say.' The thirty thousand francs I had promised appeared to him at first an enormous sum, but when he learned what I should require of him he uttered a phrase that ought to have warned me of the dangerous game I was playing. Seeing him hesitate, I said:

"'In a fortnight you will be at full liberty to leave.'

"'With the thirty thousand francs?'

"'Yes, cash down.'

"'Hum!' said he. 'It is little enough pay for such hard work.'

"But I had the folly to ignore this remark, which ought to have revealed to me the man's extraordinary cupidity, and pressed for time, I ran to the hotel, and taking a suit of clothes belonging to my master, I re-

turned with them to the bandit. Putting them on, his identity with Monsieur Brichet was perfect. While making his toilet Monday shouted with laughter, exclaiming again and again, 'Well, this is a lark!' And after a few last injunctions I preceded him to the tribunal. Five minutes later he appeared, and every one knows the scene that followed."

"He was a daring villain," said Brichet.

"Yes, and it was on remarking his audacity and his cunning that I understood the mischief I had done in making use of him."

"And then the thought occurred to you that you would murder him, too."

"No, sir," said the attendant, curtly. "I would have kept faith with him loyally, and if I did murder him later, it was his own action that forced me to it. The very first evening I began to tremble for the results of my plan, on seeing the vice to which he was addicted; one word, uttered in a fit of drunkenness, was sufficient to ruin all my hopes. At last I obtained his consent to drink only in the privacy of his chamber, and each night, locked in alone with him, I gave him instructions for the following day's deportment.

"'Very good,' Monday would say. 'I consent to all this, but it is a hundred thousand francs you will pay me, not thirty thousand.'

"Taken in my own trap, I had to submit. Now I began to pave the way for his disappearance by saying that my master had not recovered from his mania for travelling, and I feared that he would again give us the slip as before. But in reality Monday found himself too comfortable to wish to leave us, and when I demanded the signing of the will, as he had promised, he simply replied:

"'To-morrow, my dear fellow.'

"At last one day he declared boldly that he intended to continue his assumed *rôle*, and unable to control my fury I cried :

"'Then I will murder you, you scoundrel !'

"'Oh, no, you won't,' he answered quite coolly, 'you are too anxious to have that will, you know.'

"'Write it then,' I said, inwardly in the greatest alarm, 'and you shall have not one hundred but two hundred thousand francs.'

"'Ta, ta !' he retorted, laughing. 'Don't you wish you may get it. No, no, I 'm too old a bird to be caught with chaff ; and once I have written you that will, much you will concern yourself about me.'

"He was right. He had me in his power by the promise of that will. One night, when intoxication laid him almost dead at my feet, I might easily have killed him, but I dared not let him die ; the will was not made ; it was necessary to me, and I flew to call you, M. Maurice."

Evening was now fast advancing into night, and the room was enveloped in darkness, but the voice of the attendant still went on, grave and sad :

"But all my anxiety over Monday's villainy was nothing compared to the terror I endured when I knew that M. Badineau had placed the whole of Pauline's immense fortune in the hands of this bandit, and that at any moment he might escape with the millions in his possession—these millions for which I had almost given my soul !" And as if the very recollection of his sufferings were a torture to him, Pigeot groaned aloud and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "The parts we played were now changed," he continued. "Monday wished to depart, and I used every effort to detain him. Night after night I remained on guard at the door of his bedroom, for he

was a clever and active adversary, difficult to checkmate. He understood perfectly that his delay in writing the will was no longer his protection, for what use would have been the will when he decamped with Pauline's fortune? It was the money itself I must now secure, and Monday saw himself in deadly peril of death. He became frightened, and endeavored to protect himself by the constant presence of Annibal and De Lozeril, that idiot who actually imagined he was about to become my Pauline's husband.

"Good God! My poor little girl promised to such a ruffian!" exclaimed Brichet, terrified at the very thought of such a union.

"Oh, Monsieur Brichet," cried Pigeot, "do not imagine for an instant that this marriage could ever have been, for I would have killed the wretch as ruthlessly as I would crush a worm beneath my heel. No, sir, I had already chosen a husband for my beloved granddaughter, a good and honest man, and a man whom she loved. I had seen the mutual love of the young people from the beginning, and the dearest hope of my life was that Pauline should not only be rich, but happy. Do you understand me, Monsieur Maurice?"

"*I* understand you, Pigeot," answered Brichet, "and you will see this very night that your choice has been the same as mine."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the old man with heartfelt joy. Then hastening to conclude his story, with feverish excitement he continued: "Monday having accomplished the death of his two guards, prepared for instant flight, when he found me on his track; and then, having forced him to forge the will, I slew him without a moment's compunction."

After this avowal Pigeot sank into a chair as if ex-

hausted, and covering his face with his hands, wept bitterly. After a moment's pause he added, his utterance almost choked with sobs:

"In all this terrible struggle, which I fought out single-handed, I had nothing to support me but my love for Pauline, for alas, even God Himself was against me; and at the very moment when I thought my triumph was complete and final, you yourself appeared, sir, like an avenging spirit from the other world. Now I lay down my weapons. I shall fight no more. I am vanquished, and you can give me up to justice."

Brichet stood up, saying in a stern voice: "Listen to me, Pigeot," but at the same moment the sound of footsteps arose from the garden. Hidden by the darkness, Maurice leaned from the open window and listened.

"There are two people," he whispered.

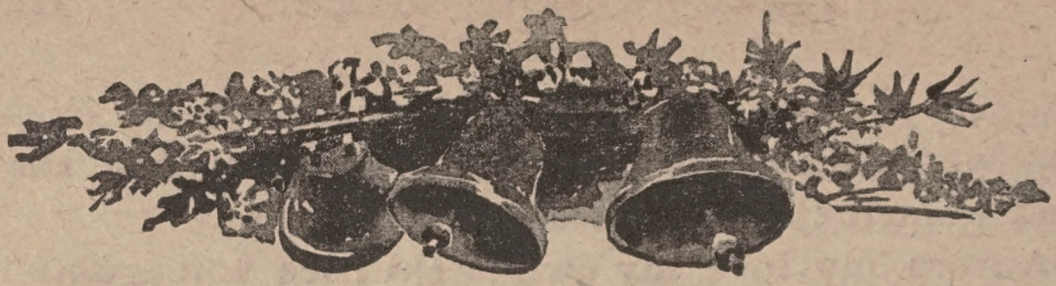
And then low voices were heard, mingled with the sound of footsteps on the gravel. It was impossible for Maurice to distinguish who the persons were, but presently they stopped beneath the window, and the voice of M. de Badieres was distinctly heard, saying:

"Let us sit down on this seat and wait. He cannot be much longer."

"At what hour is he coming?" asked the silvery voice of Aurore, vibrating clearly in the still night air.

"At nine o'clock, my child," replied the judge, as they sat down and waited beneath the window.

"Whom do they expect?" murmured the *procureur*.



CHAPTER XXXI.

Amidst the calm silence of the night the great bell of St. Louis rang out slowly nine o'clock.

"Let us go in, dear child," said the voice of M. de Badieres, "you must be there to receive M. de Cambiac."

A quiver passed through the frame of Brichet as he exclaimed, indignantly :

"Ah, what treachery! My old friend De Badieres lending himself to the intrigues of my wife and her lover!"

"Have you forgotten, Monsieur Brichet, that you are dead and buried?" whispered Maurice, and he was right, for excepting his two companions, the whole world believed that Brichet had gone to his eternal rest in the vault of St. Louis.

To the judge's suggestion Aurore replied, entreatingly :

"Oh, let us stay here. The mild evening air does me good, and then, Monsieur de Badieres, it seems that God, who has been so good to Monsieur de Cambiac and me, is looking down and smiling on us from the star-lit sky."

"Then, my child, as we cannot possibly hear the baron knock at this distance from the gate, I shall go

and open it now," and a moment later hurried footsteps were heard coming toward Aurore, and she found herself clasped in De Cambiac's arms.

"Aurore, my love, my own! Do I see you again?" he cried, showering kisses on her trembling lips, as she sank down on the seat, her heart beating with unutterable joy.

"Raoul, you are free at last!" she murmured.

"Yes, an hour ago my prison doors were opened, and I flew here on wings of love, for Monsieur de Badieres told me that death had put an end to all your miseries, my darling, and that now I might love you without remorse." Kneeling before her, his arms encircling her waist, he continued, wild with joy: "Free! my Aurore, yes, now you are free and our love, interrupted for a short time by your hateful marriage with that old man, will now be renewed, and you are henceforth mine, my very own, my life, my soul, yes—my wife! What do I care for exile now, when you will be with me, you whom I love. Come, let us go!"

"You have forgotten your promise, then, Monsieur de Cambiac," said the grave voice of the judge; "you forget that you were to go alone."

"You are right, sir," replied Raoul, "and I thank you for reminding me to keep my word."

"Painful as the effort may be, I trust that madame will not hesitate to make this sacrifice to the memory of my dear old friend, and thus conceal from the world at large how repugnant her marriage was to her own feelings. Believe me, had poor Brichet known the real state of the case, he would have been the first to give up a project which he would have known was fatal to your happiness."

"That is indeed true," whispered Brichet, on whose

ear every word smote clear and distinct, and the magistrate continued :

"If it is true that nothing remains hidden from the departed, he must know full well how faithfully you have guarded his name from all dishonor. Now let me beg you to persevere a few months longer in the same noble endeavor, and continue to bear the name of him whose only fault lay in forgetting that youth and age can never be happily united, and that a time of life comes to every man when paternal affection ought to be sufficient for him."

"You are right, sir," said Aurore, rising from her seat. "Yes, I have this last duty to perform, and the world must never know that my marriage was the unhappiness of my life, and if Monsieur Brichet had lived, I trust that he too would have remained in ignorance, for I would have striven to do my best under the martyrdom he involuntarily imposed on me."

"Yes, foolish, indeed, is the old man who imagines he can make himself beloved," murmured Brichet, mournfully.

Aurore now turned resolutely toward her lover, and said :

"Go, my Raoul. In one year I will be with you."

The baron made no resistance. It was the last sacrifice required by love and honor.

"I will wait," he said, and then one long, mad, wild embrace, and he was gone.

"How they love each other!" exclaimed Brichet, with a heartbroken sigh, and the sound of Aurore weeping bitterly was heard in the still night.

"Calm yourself, dear child," said the judge. "Very soon I shall arrange for the return of Monsieur de Cambiac, and in one year I shall have the happiness of

doing the same service for you as I have promised to do for Pauline to-night."

"What is that?" she asked.

"Look—do you see through the trees how the Church of St. Louis is being lighted up? They are preparing for Pauline's wedding, for to-night at twelve o'clock she is to be married to Maurice Gardi. Monsieur Badineau and myself are to be the witnesses."

Maurice had barely time to put his hand over Pigeot's mouth to prevent the attendant uttering a loud cry on hearing the news.

"Yes," continued the judge, "Pauline has loved him for some time, and now hastens to obey the last wishes expressed by her father in his will. She will leave Paris immediately after the ceremony."

"So soon!" cried Aurore.

"Yes, her husband wishes to remove her at once from the scene of so many terrible memories."

"I shall go to the church, too, and pray for her happiness. Meanwhile, let us return to the pavilion," and leaning on the judge's arm, Aurore walked slowly away.

Brichet stood still at the window, silent and motionless. Maurice waited a few minutes, and then said:

"What are we to do, Monsieur Brichet? Will you allow me to tell Pauline you have returned? Poor child, she is heartbroken."

To this question Brichet at first made no reply, but after a long reflection, he said:

"What would be the good? If I come back here and take my old place, justice will demand an account of this man who for a time occupied it, and I should be compelled to deliver up to punishment my own father-in-law—the grandfather of my Pauline! You never could advise such a step, Maurice!"

"No," replied the doctor.

"And further," continued Brichet, "by reappearing here I once more chain to a life of slavery a poor girl who has never wronged me, and who, thus deprived of the bright future now before her, would most certainly die of grief. No, no, she was faithful to me even when she must have cursed me in her heart, and now I owe her the only recompense I can make her," and turning toward the pavilion he stretched out his trembling hand, saying with deep emotion: "Aurore, you can marry Raoul from this day; you are free and a widow!"

"What do you mean to do?" cried Maurice, hastily, with a vague suspicion of suicide.

"I wish to remain as I am now, dead—yes, absolutely dead—'the late Brichet.' Yes, for Paris I am indeed dead and gone, but far away, in sunny Provence, in the retreat that I have chosen, and where I shall precede you by a few hours, you will hasten to bring me my Pauline after your marriage, and there, between you and her, my two children, I hope to end my days in peaceful happiness, remembering De Badieres's words, that 'a time comes in the life of every man when paternal love ought to be sufficient for him.'" Then turning to Pigeot he said: "Badineau himself has been deceived by the false will forged by Monday, giving the fortune to Pauline, and providing also for Aurore's comfort. I could have done no better myself, so it may remain. And as for you, I grant you your life. Try to repent of your crimes."

The attendant bowed his head, murmuring:

"Pauline is now rich and happy, my life is of no more use to me," and his fingers closed convulsively round the little vial in his pocket, containing the remainder of the poison he had administered to Monday.

"Maurice, I am going now," continued the *procureur*, turning once more to Gardi. "In a few hours you will follow me with Pauline. For God's sake do not delay; think of my impatience to embrace the sweet child after our long separation," and Brichet passed out quickly. Maurice watched the old man as he crossed the garden, terrified lest he should meet any inhabitant of the hotel, but all was still, and Brichet disappeared safely from the grounds. He, too, was about to go his way, when Pigeot, laying his hand on his arm, with a wail of supplication in his voice, said:

"Monsieur Maurice, in Heaven's name, promise me one last kindness! When you leave the church after the ceremony, bring me my granddaughter that I may embrace her for the first and last time in my poor life."

"I promise," said the doctor, deeply moved.

Midnight tolled from the great bell of St. Louis as Maurice and Pauline knelt with bowed heads before the altar to receive the nuptial benediction. M. Badieres and the judge were the witnesses of the quiet ceremony, while Aurore prayed silently in a corner, her face buried in her hands, her heart filled with a great joy at the thought that in another year it would be her turn. On leaving the church, where at the porch a carriage awaited them, they were met by the old attendant. Believing that she was going but a short distance from Paris, and never doubting that her faithful Colard, from whom she had never been separated, would accompany her, Pauline stopped short and exclaimed in surprise:

"Why, Colard, are you not coming with us?"

"I shall join you to-morrow," he replied.

"Oh, you naughty Colard, to leave me now!" cried the happy bride.

"Come, my darling, give your old Colard a kiss," suggested Maurice, kindly.

"No, no," returned Pauline, laughing gayly, "for his punishment I shall not kiss him until he comes to us, and that, you know, will make him come all the sooner," and with a charming pout and a pretty menacing gesture, she was gone.

Colard stood there in the church, listening as the carriage drove off at a rapid pace, carrying away from him forever the treasure of his heart, the child for whom he had sinned and suffered. Yes, Pauline was gone without even giving him the one poor kiss he had so longed for.

"Oh, God," he cried aloud in his agony, "my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

* * * * * * *

The following day "all Paris" was deeply moved by the touching story of Brichet's faithful servant, who, unable to sustain the blow of his beloved master's death, had been found that morning by the sacristan of St. Louis's Church, lying cold and stiff beside the *procureur's* tomb. He had poisoned himself with the contents of a small vial which was found clutched in his dead hand.

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